

THE
INVESTIGATORS
in

THE MYSTERY OF THE
UNDERWATER FOREST



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A nine-year-old girl asks The Three Investigators to look for her nanny, who, on record, has died a few years ago in a horrific yacht explosion. However, the girl claims that the nanny has returned in the form of a selkie, a mythological seal-like creature. When Jupiter, Pete and Bob start investigating, they realize that the case is not just about a missing person, but one that involves power games among gangland syndicates. The truth seems to lie at the bottom of the sea, hidden in the depths of an underwater forest.

The Three Investigators
in
The Mystery of the Underwater Forest

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Die drei ???: Tauchgang ins Ungewisse

(The Three ???: Dive into the Unknown)

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1. Jorunn and the Selkie

A girl was standing in front of a coffin. She did not make a face, but simply looked down at the dark wooden box.

Jupiter Jones had not seen her coming. That was amazing. After all, he had been working out here in the salvage yard for over an hour and had always had the driveway in view. Uncle Titus and Aunt Mathilda were visiting an acquaintance in hospital and Jupiter was supposed to take care of the customers, receive the mail, and take down the last Christmas decorations.

“Hello!” called Jupiter. He wiped his hands on his trousers and walked towards the girl. As always, it took him only a few seconds to scrutinise a person from head to toe and draw conclusions.

The girl was clearly smaller than him. She was thin, but not scrawny. He estimated her to be nine or ten years old at the most. Her dark hair was cut short and framed a narrow, unusually pale face. She wore a necklace of small amber stones and a coat with flat metal buttons. In general, her clothing consisted mainly of natural materials—simple, neat, but probably expensive.

Jupiter suspected that she was a collector of some sort. There were the strangest things in the salvage yard and something for every taste—from old toys to mineral collections and from tea sets to organ grinders. There were colourful paintings, garden furniture and horse saddles, empty aquariums and hamster cages, costume jewellery and doll houses, car seats and curtain rods, shed doors and grandfather clocks. That was also the reason why Jupiter’s uncle always insisted that he was not a junk dealer, as he also dealt with art and curiosities of all kinds. However, the salvage yard also had scrap metal piled up in considerable heaps. The place was a veritable treasure trove.

“It’s not real,” Jupiter explained as the girl slowly lifted her head.

“I would say the coffin is quite real,” the girl replied.

“The material is of course genuine—real, that is,” Jupe corrected himself. “However, this piece was not made to bury anyone in. It is a prop from a movie set.”

“What genre?”

“Horror... as far as I know,” Jupiter replied. “By the way, can I help you?”

“Yes,” she said.

Jupiter waited, but the girl did not say any further.

“Are you looking for something?”

“Yes.” She circled the coffin and let her gaze roam over a few stone cats standing on a table.

“Porcelain horses? Old comic books? Candlesticks? Spare parts?” Jupiter rattled off the assortment of items in the salvage yard. “Cutlery, lamps, musical instruments?”

“You.” She stopped directly in front of him and looked up at him.

“Excuse me?” asked Jupiter, confused.

“That’s the answer to your question.”

The First Investigator took a deep breath. “Since I am not part of the saleable inventory of our salvage yard, I assume that you are looking for me because you have an assignment or a message for me.”

She nodded. "Yes."

"For me and my colleagues?" Jupiter enquired.

"That's right," the girl confirmed, "because Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews are more or less part of your investigation agency, if my understanding is correct."

"Definitely more than less," Jupiter said firmly. "We are a team... but let's move on to you. Am I right in thinking that you have a case for us?"

"Yes."

Jupiter was sure that the girl was testing him. She might still be very young, but she radiated a superiority that made her seem years older.

Just as he was thinking about what conversation tactic to use with her, Bob's Beetle rolled into the yard. The car parked, then Bob and Pete jumped out.

"Wonderful," Jupe said. "My colleagues are here just in time! I would suggest you share your specific concern with us."

"Hello," Bob said good-humouredly as he stepped up to them. He eyed the girl briefly and gave her a friendly smile.

Pete came up behind them, grinning. "Guess what I—"

"We have a potential client here," Jupiter interrupted his friend.

"Oh," Bob said. "I'm curious about that." He leaned forward slightly. "I'm Bob, by the way."

"And I'm Pete!"

"Jorunn," the girl said curtly. Then she turned to Jupiter again. "I've heard that you and your colleagues specialize in mysterious, enigmatic cases."

Pete and Bob looked at their friend in confusion.

Jupiter, however, pulled out the business card of The Three Investigators. "May I give you our card?"

"Not necessary," said the girl. "I already have the information on your card... otherwise I wouldn't be here, would I?"

Before Jupiter could answer anything, Pete said: "Then you probably also know that we have already solved quite a number of cases, including ones with strange riddles, lost treasures, or alleged haunted houses."

The girl looked at him. "I don't have any riddles; I have no use for gold and precious stones; and I have not yet been able to observe supernatural phenomena at my house."

"It's okay!" Pete raised his hands defensively. "Are you by any chance related to Jupe or do you read dictionaries in your spare time?"

Jorunn passed over the question. "I want you to find my nanny."

"Your nanny?" asked Bob. He pulled out the small notepad he always carried with him.

"Well, if it's just a normal case of a missing person, you could go to the police for that," Jupiter explained, "but we might still be able to help with the search. When did you last see your nanny?"

Jorunn did not have to think long. "Around noon on 22nd November—"

"That was over a month ago!" said Pete.

"Over 49 months," the girl corrected. "My nanny died on 22nd November, four years ago."

"She died?" asked Pete in a strained voice. "That means she's dead?"

"—And we're supposed to look for her?" asked Bob with audible discomfort.

"Possibly... and yes." Jorunn glanced at the movie coffin. "Silja has returned to our bay. I suspect she is at the bottom of the sea during the day. Whether she is dead, undead or alive in some strange way, I cannot judge... but the case with her is definitely... unusual."

She hesitated. Then she continued: “The police would not be bothered with a case like this. That’s why I want you to find her.”

Pete folded his arms. How often had Jupiter and Bob persuaded him to investigate strange cases? But this was clearly going too far! He would not spend the winter holidays looking for a dead or undead nanny at the bottom of the sea. Definitely not! Judging by Bob’s expression, he seemed to feel the same way this time. Even Jupiter was sceptical.

“I’m afraid that doesn’t quite fall within our area of expertise,” the First Investigator explained to the girl.

“It definitely falls under your expertise,” Jorunn replied. “Officially, my nanny has died. Unofficially, she seems to be alive—not as a human being, though. Do you happen to know what a ‘selkie’ is?”

“Of course,” Jupiter replied. “Selkies are mythological beings that resemble a seal in the water but can assume a human form on land. They do so by shedding and replacing their skin. As far as I know, they come from Scottish mythology.”

“You think your nanny is a seal?” asked Bob, puzzled.

“I haven’t found any evidence contrary to this theory, at least not yet,” Jorunn said.

She still seemed very calm and confident. Only Jupiter noticed the tiny gestures that showed she was tense. The subject did not leave her cold, even if she acted calm on the outside.

“So what I need are unbiased investigators who can dive and are not put off by ghosts and demons,” she said.

Pete let out a short, dry laugh.

Jorunn looked at him sternly. “Please don’t make fun of me.”

“Do you seriously believe in ghosts and demons?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“Not in silly haunted stories,” Jorunn said coolly. “I am not a naïve child.”

Pete couldn’t help grinning. The girl’s eyes narrowed and her voice sounded cutting. “I can explain Einstein’s Theory of Relativity to you in four languages, list the latest publications on geopolitical power structures, and I’ll shoot an apple from a tree at twenty metres while reciting the law of universal gravitation to you.”

The Second Investigator involuntarily took a step back.

Jorunn meanwhile turned back to Jupiter. “Knowledge is power. That has been an important motto of my family for generations, but it also includes the knowledge that we don’t know everything. Anything else would be stupid and vain.”

Jupiter raised his eyebrows. This statement was clearly directed at him and he was indeed speechless for a moment. Normally it was he who surprised people with his elevated way of speaking.

Instead, Bob spoke up to relax the situation a little. “Maybe there really is a secret about your nanny... but what makes you think she’s a selkie?”

Jorunn looked at her watch. “I have a tight schedule. We can discuss the details if you agree to take the case. However, there are several clues that support my selkie theory. Among them is the fact that I saw Silja last night—in the sea!”

“What were you doing in the sea at night?” asked Pete.

“That’s one of the details we should work out later.” Jorunn reached into a small leather bag she had strapped on. “I’ll leave you my card. You can call me once you’ve decided... and please be discreet with the assignment. I don’t want my uncle or other people to know.”

She pulled out a small white card and placed it on the lid of the coffin. Then she gave Jupiter another penetrating look, turned and walked off with brisk steps behind a mountain of scrap metal.

“Very strange,” Bob commented when the girl had disappeared from his sight.

“I thought she was really scary!” Pete admitted. He looked at the First Investigator, but Jupiter looked past his colleagues, lost in thought.

Then he suddenly started running off. “Hey, wait!” he shouted as he went around the mountain of scrap metal. However, he was not fast enough.

As the First Investigator was running towards the main gate of the salvage yard, he heard a car driving off. At the gate, he looked around. The girl nor the car was nowhere to be seen. Thoughtfully, he returned to his friends.

Just then, Bob picked up Jorunn’s card and stared at it.

“Jorunn is gone,” Jupe said discontentedly. “I wonder how she knows so much about us.”

“Maybe it’s a prank,” Pete pondered. “Someone wants to tease us, for example, Skinny Norris or someone from our school!”

“I’m afraid it’s not a prank,” Bob said tonelessly. Then he handed Jupiter the card.

The name on it was... Jorunn Grey.

2. The Yacht Explosion

“Surely the surname Grey is common...” Pete wandered up and down the headquarters of The Three Investigators.

After Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus had returned, the boys had immediately convened a meeting in their headquarters, which was located in an old mobile home trailer hidden under a mountain of scrap metal. Access to the trailer was through secret entrances. Over time, the three boys had developed the trailer into a very well-equipped office and command centre for their investigations. There were computer systems, communications equipment, and even a small laboratory, kitchenette and refrigerator. Along the wall of the trailer were cupboards, shelves and cabinets housing reference material, documents, and archives of their past cases.

“It could be a coincidence,” Bob remarked.

“When it comes to William M. Grey, I don’t believe in coincidences,” Jupiter said.

William M. Grey was the head of a gangland syndicate based out of Los Angeles. The Three Investigators had locked horns with him in two previous cases, and found him to be a very difficult opponent. Grey was a deeply contradictory character. On the one hand, he would walk over dead bodies and was influential enough to put innocent people in prison. On the other hand, when he was defeated, he would fairly admit it, even if it meant having to go to prison himself.

The First Investigator rummaged in a drawer. “Jorunn was right on top of things as far as our investigation agency was concerned, and there is definitely some family resemblance between her and Mr Grey.”

“In that case, I think we should dismiss the case.” Bob ran his hand through his hair tensely. “I never want to have anything to do with that gangland boss again.”

“Neither do I,” Pete said emphatically.

“Here it is!” Jupiter had reached to the bottom of the drawer. With two fingers, the First Investigator pulled out a small piece of paper. On it was a colour print. “Remember I took a photo of Mr Grey’s ring in our last case with him? I still have it in my phone, but here’s a printout.”

The ring was gold with a flat circular head. In the centre of the head was a small embossed triangle coloured red. Surrounding the triangle was an engraved motif of numerous and randomly positioned squiggly lines.

“I remember that far too well,” Pete said, “but I really wanted to forget the whole case. I really don’t want to meet Mr Grey again... or play chess with one of his goons.”

“Maybe we don’t have to,” Jupiter reflected. “If I’m reading the connections correctly, Jorunn is probably William Grey’s niece. At the end of our conversation, she briefly mentioned her uncle, and he is not supposed to know anything about the matter. However, they do not seem to have a common residence. Mr Grey’s estate is known to us after all.” He pointed to Jorunn’s card that now lay on the table. On the back were the girl’s address and phone number.

“The man also owns a penthouse in Reno,” Bob interjected, glancing at the card. “Why shouldn’t he have a house at Lorca Bay in addition?”

“So, it looks like we now know of two unsolved mysteries regarding the Greys,” Jupiter said. “The meaning of the ring and now a nanny who reappears after her death.”

“I bet Mr Grey got rid of the nanny!” exclaimed Pete. “—And Jorunn can’t get over it. That’s why she made up that story about seal people.”

Bob raised his hand. “I vote not to take the case!”

Pete’s hand shot up as well. “Me too! Which one of you wants to go to the movies? I’m buying a round of popcorn!”

“Two unsolved mysteries...” Jupiter took a blank sheet of paper and a pen from the table.

“Not every case has to be solved,” Pete said impatiently. “Come on, Jupe! I promise you an extra large portion of popcorn. You get to choose the movie and then we’ll go get nachos or burgers somewhere.”

“I’ll buy the drinks!” Bob added. However, he already knew that they were fighting a losing battle. Jupiter Jones could not resist such a case.

Indeed, the First Investigator looked up resolutely from the sheet of paper, which now had several notes written on it. “I will make the phone call tonight. That will give us some more time to prepare.”

Pete turned towards the door. “I’m going to the cinema.”

“Have fun then,” Jupiter replied. He turned to Bob and held the note out to him. “In this case, there is an urgent need for research. I have made a list of all the issues we need to find out. Could you get it done by eight o’clock? You can have dinner with us afterwards. Aunt Mathilda is making noodle casserole.”

Jupiter got up. It was pitch dark around him. His mouth felt parched. The back of his neck ached. The First Investigator wiped his face with both hands. Then he blinked.

He had had a bad dream and was slow to realize where he was. He was not at headquarters, but in his room. Pete and Bob were not here and neither was the huge grey wolf into whose jaws he had been gazing just a moment ago.

Jupiter sighed with relief. It had just been one of those crazy dreams that so often deprived him of restful sleep. He would feel better in a moment. However, the feeling that an unexpected threat was lurking somewhere could not be shaken off so quickly.

After a while, Jupiter got up and quietly crept down the stairs. In the kitchen, he poured himself a glass of water. A faint smell of noodle casserole still hung in the air. The green plants on the window sill cast long shadows in the light of the small outdoor lamp.

The wall clock ticked unnaturally loudly. The hands were at half past two. Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus were probably fast asleep. Jupiter took a big gulp of water, then climbed back up to his room.

There he switched on the desk lamp. On the desk top were several notes and copied newspaper reports. Bob had done a good job and brought the First Investigator a full folder that evening. For that he had even been to the archives of the *Los Angeles Times*, the newspaper his father worked for. He had also made a detour to Ruxton University on the way back. In the anthropology department, he had been handed a few articles on creatures from Scottish mythology. There, by chance, he had also learned another interesting thing—Jorunn Grey had also been at Ruxton that morning and had asked about selkies.

Jorunn Grey was the daughter of an imprisoned criminal, and the future sole heiress of a gigantic family business. Her uncle was William M. Grey.

Jupiter tapped his fingers nervously on the desk top. It might be that Jorunn actually believed her late nanny was a selkie. However, it was just as likely that The Three

Investigators were walking into a trap with their eyes wide open. Nevertheless, it was out of the question for Jupiter to refuse the assignment.

Next to Bob's notes lay the photo of William Grey's gold ring. That aside, he now had to deal with a newspaper article that reported on the yacht accident:

In the early evening of 22nd November, a pleasure yacht sank in Lorca Bay. The sole person on board, Silja Beroe, 32, has been missing since the accident. It is still unclear why the yacht sank. Witnesses report a huge explosion on the water. The investigation is continuing.

A few days later, the newspaper was able to give more precise details about the explosion. An explosive device found on the fuel tank had been detonated and that was what caused the sinking of the yacht. The death of the woman was also confirmed. There was an obituary outlining a cremation followed by the interment at a public cemetery.

Jupiter found that it was suddenly very cold in the room. He grabbed a jumper and put it on, but the cold remained.

Jorunn was looking for someone who no longer existed. She wanted to bring a dead person back to life. Reluctantly, Jupe felt sorry for the girl.

3. A Near Accident

Anyone expecting a spectacular view was disappointed that morning. The sea was hidden under a dull haze.

The Three Investigators sat in Pete's MG and drove up the coastal road through a tenacious swathe of sea fog. Their destination was Jorunn's house on Lorca Bay—a small bay barely 20 kilometres west of Rocky Beach.

"I'm really mad at myself!" said Pete as he steered his car around a bend. "Every time I take it upon myself to get out of such an unearthly case in good time, I'm back in the middle of it again!"

"You should be used to it by now," Jupe replied. "If you don't mind, I want to hear the most important research results."

"Didn't you read them yesterday and store them in your brain forever?" Pete wanted to know.

"Of course," Jupiter said impassively, "but you didn't. Besides, it makes sense to tune into the case so that when we meet Jorunn Grey, we are well-prepared."

Bob opened his notepad. "I'd best start with Lorca Bay. A pleasure yacht exploded right in front of the bay on 22nd November four years ago."

"The *Silva*," Jupiter interjected, "and Jorunn's nanny went down with the yacht."

"Right," Bob said, annoyed. "Do you want to go on?"

"No."

"Most of the wreckage was recovered by the police during the investigation. The rest was probably washed out into the open sea."

"What exploded on the yacht?" asked Pete.

"An explosive device, so it stands to reason that it was an attack," Bob explained. "The police assume that Michael Grey was actually supposed to be the victim."

"Who is that?"

"Jorunn's father... who is the brother and business partner of William Grey. The police assumed it was an act of revenge. However, the perpetrator was never convicted."

"The case is as good as solved," Pete said confidently. "Shall I tell you what happened?"

"We are all ears," Jupiter replied with little conviction.

"Jorunn's father was definitely involved in shady business and stolen goods were hidden on the yacht at the time. Now some scoundrels are looking for it, and so that they can't be recognized, they disguise themselves as seals... or they have trained seals to find the treasure."

"I spoke to Inspector Cotta," Bob interjected. "The police searched the whole bay, but the divers found nothing. Besides, why would a diver disguise himself as a seal? That would draw far too much attention to himself. After all, this coast is crawling with scuba divers."

"It was just an idea," Pete said, offended.

"commendable that you come up with your own theories, Pete," Jupiter said, "but now, we should continue listening to Bob's report."

"The bay is quite well protected from storms and currents due to its location," Bob read from his notepad. "In addition, the coastal section is only sparsely inhabited—ideal

conditions for plants and animals, among others, for night herons that go fishing there. However, the kelp forest that extends under the water is said to be particularly impressive.”

“I know that from dives in Monterey Bay,” Pete exclaimed. “Kelp forests are really great but also a bit scary. Because of the huge algae fronds, you feel like you’re swimming through an enchanted jungle!”

“If I tell you what I found out about selkies, you’ll probably never go diving again,” Bob stated.

“Great, but if I have to deal with ravening creatures from the deep, I’d rather know everything about them,” Pete said, “even if they are just treasure hunters in disguise in the end.”

“Don’t worry, Pete, selkies are not ravening creatures,” Jupiter explained. “In mythology, they are rather peaceful creatures from the sea.”

“Are you going to recite the results of my research again?” Bob raised an eyebrow.

Jupiter cleared his throat. “I merely wanted to point out that the legends give no cause for alarm.”

“Okay, I admit I was just trying to wind Pete up a bit,” Bob confessed. “I didn’t find anything about ravening creatures. However, the stories are already predominantly gloomy... and often tragic.

“Female selkies are mentioned particularly often. If a man takes one of their shedded seal skins and hides it, this selkie must become his wife and stay with him in human form. If, however, she finds her skin again, she returns to the sea as a seal. In some legends, selkies can only make contact with a human once every seven years.”

“Is there a connection between the selkie myth and Lorca Bay?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“Well, there are California sea lions and elephant seals as well as harbour seals in the area,” Bob replied. “The kelp forest is an excellent hunting ground for seals.”

“We’re almost there!” Pete announced.

He slowed down a little and turned onto Solstice Drive, a narrow side road leading to the sea. Jorunn’s house was not visible in the thick fog. In fact, there was no house to be seen at all, and neither was the sea. It could be anywhere. The Second Investigator narrowed his eyes.

“Look out!” Bob yelled out. Pete jerked the wheel around.

An old grey pick-up truck had appeared out of nowhere and was speeding towards them despite the poor visibility.

“What—” Jupiter gasped, but he did not finish the sentence. His hands clutched at the seatbelt. A horn blared—like a low mournful wail of a foghorn.

Pete tried to keep his MG under control, but the car had already gone off the road and was bumping over uneven ground. The Second Investigator stepped firmly on the brakes.

Then there was a crunching noise! The car came to an abrupt stop. The boys were thrown against their seatbelts and then roughly thrown back on their seats. All three took a deep breath. That had been close.

“My car,” Pete gasped. “My beautiful car!”

“What a nerve!” Bob rumbled. “The driver was so reckless. Such speed, and in the fog on these narrow roads!”

“I guess we hit a small rock,” Jupiter speculated.

Pete let his head sink onto the steering wheel. “This is off to a good start.”

Bob patted him on the shoulder. “We have to check your car to see if it still runs.”

Suddenly, a woman approached the car from behind. “Tell me, are you still in your right mind? Idiots!” She was tall and very powerfully built.

The First Investigator stepped out of the car briskly. "I resent such insults, ma'am! My friend was driving according to regulations."

"Get out of here! And don't come back again!" She turned on her heel and stumbled back to her car. A few seconds later, the engine of the pick-up sounded.

"Wait!" Pete burst out. "You caused me to damage my car. I—"

However, the pick-up was already disappearing in a cloud of dust and fog. When Jupiter got back into the car, Pete put it in reverse. Sure enough, the car was still moving. However, it rattled and clattered as if it would fall apart at any moment.

When Pete parked in the driveway to Jorunn's house a moment later, smoke was billowing out from under the bonnet. The Second Investigator patted the car like a faithful horse. "I'll charge it to the Greys!" he said in a quivering voice.

"Come, fellas. We'll ring the bell." Jupiter had just started to move when a gust of wind swept the fog apart and revealed a view of Jorunn's house. With quite different reactions—Pete was relieved, Bob interested, and Jupiter disappointed.

The house was neither a spooky haunted mansion nor a swanky ostentatious building. As it turned out shortly afterwards, it was surprisingly normal both from the outside and the inside. Unlike his brother, Michael Grey apparently liked it plain. The stylish furnishings consisted mainly of light shades, lots of stone and wood.

After Jorunn had received The Three Investigators, she led the boys directly into a large kitchen-living room, where they were greeted by a loud 'bing!' from the microwave.

"I asked Deidre to organize some biscuits for tea," Jorunn explained.

"Who is Deidre?" asked Pete, looking around.

"Deidre Grey-Walker, my current nanny," Jorunn replied, unusually chatty. "—And just for your information, she is not a selkie, but a trained roofer. My uncle hired her about ten months ago. Her predecessors were not particularly reliable and my uncle now prefers to use relatives for important posts. Deidre and I are related by blood, albeit more distantly." She peered disapprovingly into the microwave. "Cinnamon buns—an almost welcome change from the usual doughnuts."

"That's great," Pete said.

"Deidre can't cook." Jorunn placed four white plates on a tray. Next to them, she placed four teacups.

"Ha! I prepare the best microwave ready meals in the world!" said a voice with a strong English accent.

A young woman entered the kitchen. She spontaneously reminded Pete of the advertisement models for Irish or Scottish sheep wool jumpers. She had red, curly hair just like the models and looked just as rugged. In terms of stature, however, she was more like the sheep. She had short legs and was quite chubby in the middle. Nevertheless, she wore leggings that were a size too small, along with well-worn Doc Martens boots.

"Well, everything okay here?" the woman asked.

"Probably less than ideal, I suppose," said Jorunn, glancing at the cinnamon buns. "—But it will do. We'll go to my study."

"Okay." Deidre grabbed a pastry from her plate. "Go ahead. I'm going out on the terrace—fresh air and exercise and all that stuff, you know."

"Don't make me laugh," Jorunn stated shaking her head as her nanny left the room. "She can't cook, she doesn't know anything about parenting, and she's messy and incredibly lazy. She only goes out to sneak a smoke and thinks I won't notice."

They followed Jorunn into a large room full of shelves. It was a simply furnished combination of office and library. Jupe discovered numerous works on science, technology,

psychology, criminology and much more.

“My car is damaged,” Pete told Jorunn.

“Is this relevant information?” asked Jorunn. She put the tray down between two stacks of books, then sat down behind the desk and looked challengingly at the boys.

“Possibly,” Jupe said. He looked around in vain for a place to sit. The Three Investigators were apparently supposed to stand. “An oncoming vehicle forced us off the road just before we reached here. It was an old grey pick-up in poor condition. The driver immediately became abusive even though she was at fault for the accident.”

Jorunn put her fingertips together deliberately slowly. Her face showed no emotion, but her voice sounded strained. “That was Mrs Planter, my neighbour—probably under the influence of residual alcohol.”

“Then we should go by her place later and complain,” Pete growled. “She’s welcome to pay for my car’s repair!”

“I don’t think Mrs Planter is insured,” Jorunn replied, “and she doesn’t have much finances either. I will have your damaged car assessed and repaired. Meanwhile, I will arrange another car for you to use for the duration of your investigation. For now, without further delay, I’d like to get on with the case.”

Pete swallowed the comment that was on the tip of his tongue, namely that Jorunn behaved exactly like Jupiter. She was a walking dictionary of bombastic words with an excessive amount of self-confidence and assertiveness. The Second Investigator stepped uneasily from one foot to the other.

Meanwhile, the girl sat bolt upright at the desk and eyed The Three Investigators. “May I ask what you already know so that I don’t have to elaborate unnecessarily?”

“We are well-informed.” Jupiter succinctly summarized the information they had obtained on Lorca Bay and the selkies, then cleared his throat. “But now to you—your full name is Jorunn Agatha Cecilia Grey. You will be ten on 19th February. Your parents are from England and Norway, but you were born and raised in the US. You are the only niece of William M. Grey, a wealthy entrepreneur who owns several companies, casinos and nightclubs. He is also considered a weighty player in organized crime.”

At the last words, Jupiter looked piercingly at Jorunn. She returned the look without blinking.

Jupiter continued: “Your father is Michael W. Grey, the younger brother and right-hand man of William M. Grey. While your uncle has never been convicted so far, your father was arrested four years ago and has been in prison ever since.”

“—Among other things, for tax evasion and money laundering,” Bob added. After all, he had found out much of this information—not Jupiter. “As long as your father is in prison, your uncle is your guardian,” he continued, “and—”

Bob hesitated to say the next sentence, but Jupiter took over from him: “—Your mother left the family when you were three years old. That’s why you’ve been looked after by nannies ever since.”

Jorunn nodded curtly. “My first nanny was not exactly warm-hearted, but competent. When she had to quit for health reasons, my father hired Silja Beroe. She stayed for a year.”

“Then she died while on board your father’s pleasure yacht,” Jupiter said.

“She was in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Jorunn said. Her voice was firm and clear at this, but there was something menacing in her gaze. “I heard the explosion.”

Pete swallowed. “So it’s all quite hard for you.”

Bob also looked at the girl sympathetically. “Are you sure we are the right ones to help you?”

“Yes, I need investigators, not psychologists,” Jorunn explained without batting an eyelid. “Silja Beroe has reappeared... and quite literally.”

Bob and Pete exchanged a quick glance, but Jorunn was not fazed by this.

“I hardly deal with mythology,” she continued. “I don’t have time for that, but Silja was almost the archetype of a nature spirit.”

“Pretty and mysterious?” asked Pete.

“That sums it up,” Jorunn replied.

“Are there any photos of her?” Bob wanted to know.

“No, but if you’re interested in facts for your investigation—she was about 1.70 metres tall, weighed an estimated 55 kilos, had waist-length dark brown hair and green eyes. Her expressive eyebrows and a dark birthmark on her left cheek were conspicuous.”

Bob hurriedly wrote down everything Jorunn said. Pete listened tensely and Jupiter pinched his lower lip, a sign that he was thinking hard.

“I’m definitely still missing the connection between her death and the selkie myth here so far,” the First Investigator said. “What makes you think Silja Beroe is a selkie?”

“She used to sing a certain song for me every night,” Jorunn said. “Don’t ask me to perform it. I don’t sing as a matter of principle.”

“I assume that the content of the song is more important than the melody,” Jupiter said.

“It was about a woman from the sea who hides her seal skin, goes ashore and starts a life among humans,” Jorunn explained, “but she has a longing for the ocean. When her husband almost finds the skin one day, she goes away and never returns.”

“A slightly different variant of the usual selkie legends,” Jupiter noted, “but it could still be a folk song.”

Jorunn nodded curtly. “Maybe... I was still easily impressed when I was five. One evening, I asked Silja if she was a selkie herself. She looked at me very seriously and sadly, and said she was not allowed to tell me that. That was a week before she went down with the wreckage of the *Silva*.”

“Goodness,” Pete remarked.

Jorunn did not respond. “After the accident, I would have liked to believe in selkies, but over time I stopped fooling myself—until I saw her again in the sea.”

“That was the day before yesterday?” Bob asked.

“Right. I was struggling in the water, and then she came swimming up. She looked changed and I think she was still half in seal form, but I recognized her voice and her eyes.” Jorunn paused for a moment.

For a moment, Jupe thought he could see behind her façade, but then Jorunn’s expression froze into ice again.

“She brought me ashore and quietly sang the song in my ear,” Jorunn said.

“You say you were struggling in the water,” Jupiter said. “In the absence of oxygen, you may see things that aren’t there—especially as it was also, if I remember correctly, in the middle of the night.”

“What were you doing there anyway?” Pete asked.

Before Jorunn could reply, the door of the study room was suddenly pushed open and Deidre stumbled in.

“Can’t you—” Jorunn began, but then she broke off. Startled, she stared at her nanny. There was blood on Deidre’s hands, hair and face!

4. Poseidon's Lair

“What happened?” Jupiter was the first to react and jumped to the nanny’s aid.

“I fell on the rocks!” Deidre leaned on Jupiter’s shoulder. Then her knees buckled. The First Investigator just barely got hold of her.

“We have to get an ambulance!” shouted Pete.

“Absolutely!” Bob agreed with him and reached for the phone.

The nanny was in a bad state. The palms of her hands were scraped up, a laceration gaped at her temple. A thick bruise was already forming there and the skin was turning blue.

“How did this happen?” asked Jorunn tensely.

“Someone was at the back door.” Deidre groaned. “I think I surprised a burglar!”

“Can you describe him in more detail?” urged Jorunn.

“No. It was a dark figure and the fog is still so thick. I was terribly frightened and then I slipped off the rock I was standing on.”

“Where was the rock?” Jupiter wanted to know.

“Just alongside the terrace of the house,” Deidre replied wanly.

“We should definitely go and see,” Jupiter said excitedly. “Which way is the way out?” Deidre groaned. “I feel dizzy.”

“The ambulance is coming,” Bob announced.

“Which way is out?” repeated Jupe emphatically.

Pete hurried to the window, but there was nothing there but dense, grey fog. “The burglar is probably long gone by now.”

“He jumped into the sea,” Deidre stated.

“To the terrace!” At last Jorunn started to move.

Jupiter followed her as fast as he could. Shortly afterwards, he stepped out into the open behind the girl. The terrace was surrounded on the sides by natural stone walls and was on a small platform, no more than two metres above the current sea level. It ended at rough rocks that led down to the water.

Jupiter suspected that Deidre had looked for a place to smoke there and discovered the person when she wanted to go back into the house. The stones were wet. If not careful, anyone could easily slip.

He looked around attentively, but he could not see far. In the distance, the foghorn of a ship sounded. Small waves slapped against the rocks. Behind them wafted a murky soup of water vapour in which hardly anything was clearly visible.

Then the First Investigator noticed a dark spot a few metres away. He narrowed his eyes, but could no longer see anything at that spot. Instead, there was a movement a little further to the right. Something was swimming in the water. From its size, it could be a seal... or a human being.

Jupiter carefully climbed over the rocks to get closer, but whatever he had seen had disappeared. The First Investigator waited another two minutes, then decided to go back and check the back door.

Jorunn stood stock-still on the terrace, staring into the grey haze as if it would clear away with her gaze. “I’m going back to attend to Deidre,” she said firmly, tearing herself away

from the sight of the sea of fog. Then she turned abruptly and disappeared into the house.

The First Investigator turned around. He felt he was being watched, but there was nothing behind him. He nervously stroked the back of his neck. Then he walked across the terrace to the side of the house. Here a narrow, tiled path led along the house. There was only one small window and another back door. It was locked and there were no traces of an attempted break-in.

However, the First Investigator discovered something else—there was a piece of seaweed in front of the door. Jupiter picked up the plant and looked at it. It looked as if it had just been torn off. Had someone come out from the sea and brought with it the seaweed? Was there someone who wanted to scout the property under the cover of the thick fog?

“So, did you see anyone?” asked Bob in a hushed voice as Jupiter returned to the study.

“There was something,” Jupiter said, “but I don’t know if it was an animal or a human being. The view was too bad for that. It’s quite possible that someone had been on the terrace to spy on the house.”

“I swear to you, I saw something!” Deidre ran a hand through her red curls and winced as she touched the wound on her forehead. “—And it disappeared into the sea. I’m pretty sure of that by now because I heard a splash!”

“Have you seen anyone near the house lately?” Jupiter wanted to know.

Deidre looked at him with a pained face. “No... no one... apart from our neighbour, Mrs Planter.”

“Could that have been her just now?” Bob enquired. His intention was to keep the nanny awake and let her talk so that she wouldn’t lose consciousness at least until the ambulance arrived. Besides, the conversation seemed to distract Deidre somewhat from her pain.

“Maybe,” she murmured, “it all just happened too fast.”

“Can you tell us more about her?” asked Jupiter as Deidre closed her eyes in a daze.

“About Mrs Planter?”

“Yes. Every detail can be important,” Jupiter said. “The woman could be the burglar—or a witness.”

“Witness? In this fog?” Deidre opened her eyes again. “Why would Mrs Planter break into our house?”

“Her exact role still has to be investigated,” Jupe said.

“I don’t think Mrs Planter would break in anywhere.” Deidre snorted softly. “She’s about as active as a rock... but she used to be a marine biologist.”

“Marine biologist?” repeated Jupiter thoughtfully.

“Yes, but her career can’t have been that great. At some point she took over her family’s property.”

“Poseidon’s Lair,” Jorunn added.

“That’s right, that’s the name of the boarding house she runs,” Deidre continued in a brittle voice, “but hardly any people go there because Mrs Planter doesn’t look after the place very well. She likes to have a drink, and she’s not very good at cleaning or tidying up.”

“Maybe you saw a strange thing from the sea,” Pete pondered aloud.

Deidre leaned back with a groan. “Mrs Planter is a strange thing herself.”

“We’ll pay the lady a visit anyway,” Jupiter said with a glance at his watch. “She might be back by now... if she was away at all just now.” He cleared his throat. “Before we take any further investigative steps, I have a few questions for you, Jorunn.”

Jorunn shook her head, barely perceptible. "Not now. The ambulance should be here any moment. I'll go with Deidre. You can go over to the boarding house or look for tracks by the sea in the meantime, but you can't stay here in the house."

"But—" Bob started, but Jorunn cut him off.

"We'll sort out everything else later, I promise. I'll send you a message when you can pick me up at the hospital."

"But I don't know if my car will make it there," Pete interjected.

"As I said, I will provide you with a vehicle," Jorunn said. She disappeared for a moment and returned with a key ring containing a car key fob and a remote control. "Please take the silver car on the far right. You can drive it as long as you work for me and your car is in the workshop. Please remember to lock the garage. The remote control is on this key ring."

Poseidon's Lair was half-hidden behind some jagged rocks jutting into the bay. It was a two-storey building clad in white wooden clapboards. These had become grey and unsightly over the years. Wind, sun and rough tides had taken their toll on the boarding house.

As the boys came closer, a couple of seagulls that had perched on the roof, fluttered up. In the meantime, the fog had lifted a little, revealing a view of the surrounding area.

Next to the boarding house was a boat shed that looked as if it would collapse at any moment. It was already missing several roof tiles. The roughly carpentered jetty also looked as if it would not last much longer.

"It doesn't look very inviting," Pete thought. "No wonder hardly anyone wants to rent rooms here."

In the meantime, Jupiter had discovered an old bell pull—a rope with perforated stones. He pulled hard on it. A bell rang. The boys waited, but nothing happened.

"No one home?" Jupe peered into one of the windows.

Not much could be seen through the dirty pane, but what he saw was all the more astonishing. Several suitcases were lying on the floor. The room looked as if it had not been entered for a hundred years. The suitcases, on the other hand, looked new and expensive. Next to them were two boxes made of shiny metal and an elongated black plastic bag.

"Looks like she has guests after all."

"—But there is no car anywhere to be seen."

"Maybe the boat shed is used as a garage?" Bob pondered aloud as he rang the bell one more time.

Jupiter was still peering through the window. "The things could be photographic equipment or components of a telescope."

Pete swallowed as the First Investigator voiced his next thought. "There could also be a rifle in the bag."

"A harpoon, like divers use, would also be a long object," Bob reflected as he now knocked on the door. Nothing happened. Then he rattled it carefully. "This thing is so old you could probably get it open without a lock pick."

"With your lock picks, however, we should be significantly faster," Jupiter said.

"No!" Pete folded his arms. "That's breaking and entering!"

"My investigation sense tells me something is wrong here," said the First Investigator. "We'll just have a quick look around and check the strange suitcases."

Pete frowned. "There's no reason for that! We can just wait until Mrs Planter comes back."

"I just want to get an impression," Jupiter replied.

“Pete’s got a point, Jupe,” Bob admitted.

“Fellas, there is clearly no one here,” Jupe argued. “Mrs Planter is still out. We’ll just have a quick look around, then we’ll leave—without a trace and without risk.” He looked at Pete in an urgent manner.

“My gut says ‘no’,” Pete growled as he pulled out his lock picks. “—But with you around, my gut basically has no say in the matter.”

“Because my belly is just bigger than yours,” Jupiter said, patting his obese midriff.

“Done,” Pete announced after only a few steps.

The old door creaked open. A smell of dust, fried fish, rum and cold tobacco smoke hit them. There was no door from the corridor that led directly to the room with the suitcases. The boys first had to enter straight ahead into the large kitchen, from which several doors led off. Here, pink wallpaper was peeling off the walls. There was a dirty sink, an old stove, and a kitchen bench with a faded patchwork quilt hanging over it. On the table in front of it were used plates and glasses, empty bottles and a greasy frying pan. A long bread knife lay on a cutting board full of crumbs.

“Mrs Planter had a visitor,” Jupiter remarked.

“—Or she hasn’t done the dishes for a long time,” Bob said. “I wouldn’t put it past her. The house is in a disastrous state.”

“Is that so?”

The boys wheeled around, startled.

A woman had entered the kitchen from one of the doors. She was around fifty, corpulent and wearing dungarees with paint stains. It was the woman from the pick-up truck!

“Mrs Planter!” Bob exclaimed.

“We... er...” Pete began.

“Please excuse our trespass,” Jupiter began, but the woman grabbed the long knife from the table and glared at the boys.

“Don’t move!”

5. At the Police Station

“Please... we are not—” Jupiter began but was interrupted.

“In there!” The landlady wrenched open a narrow door that led to a windowless pantry. When the boys hesitated, she slowly moved the knife back and forth as if considering who to attack first.

“It’s okay!” Pete was the first to enter the pantry.

The three of them were not exactly comfortable between the shelves. The woman locked the door behind them. Then they heard something heavy being pushed in front of it—perhaps a chest of drawers. Except for the sparse light that fell through the cracks in the door, it was pitch dark in the pantry.

“Great!” said Pete sarcastically. “We’re stuck in an armed woman’s creepy house—in the pantry at that. I hope we’re not on her next meal.”

Jupiter made a contemptuous noise. “Stop dramatizing the situation unnecessarily, Pete.”

“Next time my gut will definitely be in charge,” Pete grumbled.

“Gut feelings don’t always point the way,” Jupiter replied quietly. “It is appropriate to weigh up reason and gut in each case.”

“—Or listen to the heart,” Bob murmured.

Pete laughed dryly. “Sure, all these will be overridden by an obsession with mysteries.”

The First Investigator did not respond. Instead, he began to examine his surroundings closely—as far as that was possible in the narrow, dark room. “The fact is that we have to get out of here. The question is how best to do it.”

“Break down the door,” Pete murmured.

“We don’t have the space to get momentum,” Jupiter countered. “Besides, there’s something in front of it.”

“Pry open the door?”

“For that we would need something that could be used as a lever.” The First Investigator scanned the shelf next to him. “We definitely need light.”

A rustle sounded, then a soft click. A small, round cone of light lit up and blinded Jupiter, who immediately had to close his eyes.

“Good thing I brought a flashlight,” Bob remarked.

“Better switch on your mobile phone,” Pete suggested. “Then we’ll call Inspector Cotta.”

“Good idea,” thought Bob.

Jupiter, however, was not enthusiastic about this. “We have only just begun our investigation. Wouldn’t it be a bit embarrassing to ask the police for help now? I would hate to be rescued. Besides, then we’ll have to explain what we were doing here and who we’re working for.”

“That might be less bad than rotting in this pantry! Or being dismembered by Mrs Planter,” Pete countered.

Bob meanwhile examined the shelves. They were full, but none of the many things were suitable for prising open a door. The boys were about to make a new plan when they heard a siren in the distance.

“The police!”

“They’re coming here!”

Only a few minutes later, the boys heard several people enter the kitchen.

“In there!” cried Mrs Planter. “I’ve locked them in!”

“Give me a hand,” a man’s voice demanded. There was a rumbling, followed by grinding noises. Then the key was turned in the lock and the door was yanked open. The Three Investigators looked down the barrel of a gun.

“Hands up!” a grey-haired official ordered. “You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law...”

The police station was located in a flat, white brick building in the nearby town of Gabriello Heights. The Three Investigators were led into an office without comment. Jupiter noticed that the windows were barred.

“We would like to speak to Inspector Cotta,” he said as calmly and gracefully as he could in the situation. “The inspector is with the Rocky Beach police.”

“I’m a policeman,” said the grey-haired man who had detained them at Mrs Planter’s boarding house, “not a genie. That’s why I don’t grant wishes.” He stood next to the door.

“We work closely with the Rocky Beach Police Department,” Jupiter tried again. “Inspector Cotta can confirm that.”

“You have entered a private property without permission,” said the officer, unimpressed. “You have broken the law.”

“Please, sir! May I give you our card?” Jupe handed him the card of The Three Investigators. It said:



“We are investigators!” now Bob joined in. “—And we have already helped the police in many cases.”

“My colleague will check it out.” The grey-haired man beckoned a young man through the glass pane in the door. He entered the room briefly, took the card and promised to enquire.

Now the boys were at least somewhat relieved. Inspector Cotta would give them a telling off, but so far he had still stood up for The Three Investigators.

After waiting for about ten minutes, a man and a woman entered the room. Neither of them was wearing a police uniform.

“Thank you,” the man said curtly to the grey-haired man. He put a briefcase on the table and adjusted his tie. “You can go now.”

“Very well, sir,” said the policeman. He stepped out into the corridor and closed the door behind him.

“Sit down!” the woman said. Her voice sounded cool.

“We would like to speak to Inspector Cotta of the Rocky Beach Police Department,” Jupiter requested again.

The man smiled, then reached into his jacket. “I’m Special Agent Ross and this is my colleague, Special Agent Wright.”

“FBI?” Bob said, startled.

“That’s right.”

“We allegedly committed trespassing under California Penal Code Section 602,” Jupiter said emphatically. “This is definitely not a matter for the investigative arm of the US Department of Justice!”

He eyed the two agents critically. The man was in his late forties, well-groomed, athletic, with striking features. His eyes were strikingly bright. The woman was about ten years younger, slim, very plainly dressed, wore expensive glasses and had her chin-length white-blonde hair accurately blow-dried. What she was thinking was not apparent. Her facial expression was inscrutable.

Neither of them responded to Jupiter’s objection. Instead, Special Agent Ross placed the card of The Three Investigators on the table in front of him. “So you are working on a case. Who gave you the assignment?” he asked.

“That’s confidential,” Jupiter said and Pete once again admired his friend for remaining calm in such moments and not letting himself be intimidated.

“Not for us.” Special Agent Ross laughed jovially. “I assume your visit to Mrs Planter had something to do with your case.”

“Exactly!” Pete defended himself. His voice trembled slightly. “There are strange suitcases in Mrs Planter’s house.”

Jupiter gave Pete a reprimanding look.

“Strange suitcases,” echoed the FBI agent, amused. “Of course, that’s a reason to break into her house right away.”

“Did you ask Mrs Planter about the suitcases?” Special Agent Wright wanted to know. “There may be a very simple explanation for this.”

“Possibly,” Special Agent Ross confirmed with a grin. “People can own suitcases.”

“We spoke to Inspector Cotta, by the way,” the woman said. “He has vouched for you.”

“Thank you.”

Special Agent Ross nodded generously. “But before you go, we would like to know what kind of case you are working on and who engaged you.”

“A child from the neighbourhood,” Jupiter said. He had decided to play it down. “We were supposed to prove that there are no ghosts in the neighbourhood.”

“I think you could use your holidays more wisely.” Special Agent Ross stood up. “Apologize to Mrs Planter, and in future, you ring the bell when you visit someone... understand?”

6. The Underwater Forest

“I hate to say it, but we’ve not achieved anything!” Pete stood with Jupiter and Bob in front of the garage at No 1 Solstice Drive. “On top of that, we had to pay six dollars for a taxi.”

“At least the police let us go.” Bob sighed. “We were very lucky.”

Jupiter said nothing. He thought about the two FBI agents. Why were they interested in an ordinary house break-in?

“And it gets worse!” Pete pulled out the key fob Jorunn had given him. “Inspector Cotta is guaranteed to give us a severe telling off.” He pressed energetically on the small remote control hanging from the key ring. The garage door went up with a whirring sound.

“I wonder—” Jupe began, but the rest of the sentence was lost in a yelp from the Second Investigator.

“My goodness!” Pete stared with wide eyes at the cars in the garage. “Greys don’t do things by halves!”

“I’d say you have the key to that one!” Bob pointed to the silver car parked on the far right.

“A Tesla!” Pete beamed all over his face. “Guys, forget my objections. I couldn’t care less about the sea monsters and the six dollars right now, and Cotta can rant for two days because of me. We’re going to pick up Jorunn right away!”

Reverently, Pete got into the car and his friends did the same.

“I think it’s time to turn the tide on this one,” Jupiter decided as Pete drove out of the garage. “We clearly need more background information from Jorunn.”

“Do you hear anything?” asked Pete between them. “Impressive. No engine noise.”

Bob, who was sitting on the back seat, just mumbled to himself and folded his arms.

“Are you all right?” asked Pete when he saw Bob’s face in the rear-view mirror.

“Everything’s great!” said Bob sourly.

In fact, Bob knew it wasn’t. Pete would change his mind at the sight of a car and Jupiter was once again one hundred per cent fixated on solving a case. Sometimes it seemed as if all there was to do was present them with the right thing to make them forget everything else. On the other hand, Bob became increasingly aware, with each new event unfolding, that they were working for Mr Grey’s niece. Jorunn might only be nine years old, but her lineage alone made her dangerous. The fact that they were getting nowhere was perhaps because they could have already fallen into a trap.

Jupiter saw Jorunn from a distance. She was standing alone in front of the hospital building. Under the tall pillars of the entrance area, she looked even paler and narrower than usual. She suddenly seemed very small to Jupiter. The girl got into the car with them.

“How is Deidre?” Bob asked.

“She has a mild concussion and a sprained ankle. She will stay here overnight for observation,” Jorunn said. “What’s new with you?”

The boys had decided not to tell Jorunn about the police matter. “Unfortunately, we were unable to make any progress with Mrs Planter,” Jupiter admitted, “so we have to get a more

accurate picture of the scene ourselves. Fortunately, as experienced divers, we can thoroughly explore the underwater world of the bay.”

“Yes, we can,” Pete said, “but the question is whether we want to.”

“First we need to know how the encounter between you and your former nanny went the night before last,” Jupiter said firmly. “We want all the details.”

Jorunn hesitated. “It was decidedly surreal. That’s why I’m very reluctant to talk about it.”

“When we dive in the bay, we take a risk. I want to be able to assess it.”

“You don’t have to dive at all for now,” Jorunn said. “We’ll go straight to my place and then I’ll show you something.”

At the Greys’ property, Pete parked the expensive car in the garage. Then The Three Investigators followed Jorunn into the house. This time she did not go into the kitchen, but to a staircase leading downstairs.

“There are natural caves in the rocks under our house. My parents had one of them converted into a basement,” Jorunn explained as they descended. “My father uses this basement as his office.”

“Now the house is getting scary after all,” Pete muttered.

The Greys’ basement, however, was neither a dark dungeon nor a damp and cold cave. The room, cut into the rock, was heated and covered with light grey stone slabs. Several framed pencil drawings hung on the walls. The sparse furnishings were bathed in a friendly light by cleverly installed lighting. Apart from a desk with nothing on top, there was an empty shelf and a filing cabinet. Basically, it didn’t even look like an office as it was so empty. This was not surprising considering Jorunn’s father was not around to use it.

What was really remarkable was the window. It was large and oval and set into the rock wall. It looked directly into the sea. Underwater spotlights illuminated the unusual view. Seemingly weightless, huge algae floated in the gentle current. Millions of tiny particles floated through the turquoise water like snowflakes. A large, bright red fish swam by, suddenly accelerated and disappeared behind a rock covered with water plants.

Pete felt as if he were looking directly into an underwater fairy-tale forest. The unnatural light intensified the effect.

“An impressive view!” Jupe admitted appreciatively. “I would still like to know what exactly happened on the night in question.”

“I have trouble sleeping. That’s why I often sit here by the window and look at the sea,” Jorunn reluctantly confessed. “On the night of 27th December, I came here to the office just before midnight. I didn’t want to turn on the light in here, only the outside spotlights. However, before I got to do that, I spotted something.” She stepped closer to the oval window. “The seaweed has become very thick in the last few years. I used to be able to see a small reef from the window. When I looked into the sea the night before last, I saw something among the seaweed fronds. It was a light, almost like a fire—an unsteady flickering, different from what you know from underwater lamps. Then a figure appeared.”

“A diver who likes to go out at night?” asked Pete.

“Diving is expressly forbidden so close to our property,” Jorunn replied. “My father has leased part of the bay. There are signs indicating that.”

“Not everyone obeys signs,” Bob pointed out. He remembered how often The Three Investigators had disregarded warnings and notices. In many instances, a ‘No Trespassing’ sign had never deterred the three boys.

“Maybe they were divers looking for treasure...” Pete returned to his earlier theory.

“There is no treasure hidden in our bay.” Jorunn waved it off. “I have been to underwater forests many times for diving. There are no gold doubloons there, no treasure chests, no raw materials. In case you’ve seen too many James Bond movies, there’s no secret base with nuclear missiles there, nor a hidden satellite that my father wants to send into space.”

“Then that’s settled,” Jupiter remarked dryly.

“Apart from that,” Jorunn continued unperturbed, “I didn’t see any divers, just shapeless shadows floating in the seaweed—and this strange flickering. So I put on my diving gear and got into the sea.”

“You what?” Bob muttered incredulously.

Pete looked at the girl, stunned. “You just went diving alone like that? Without telling anyone? And at night? All because you saw a mysterious light and some shadows in the sea?”

“I recognize a certain resemblance to someone we know so well,” Bob remarked, but no one paid him any attention.

“I tried to wake Deidre,” Jorunn said impassively, “but I was unsuccessful in doing so. The woman has a remarkable deep sleep. So I went out alone. I took a harpoon and several knives with me, of course, just in case something dangerous was going on down there.”

“Seems like the most appropriate thing to do,” Pete said sarcastically.

“My dive was quite unspectacular at first, until I got close to the reef. The flickering had stopped by then, but I could make out a few dim lights... and in the glow of these lights, I saw something. I think they were seals. I wanted to look closer, but then something attacked me.”

“A selkie?” Pete wanted to know.

Jorunn shrugged his shoulders. “Whatever it was, it came from behind and it was big. The hose from my scuba tank was ripped off, something was pulling me down. I was running out of air, so I pulled one of my knives. There was a struggle. At first it looked good for me. I caught my attacker. A cloud of blood enveloped us.

“Everything that followed, however, I can unfortunately only guess at. I guess that my attacker hit a heavy object against my head. He then pushed me off him. I was half unconscious and needed to breathe urgently. With the last of my strength I tried to get to the surface. I remember thinking that the blood might attract sharks.

“Then I was grabbed again. At first I thought it was a seal, but it was much bigger and moved more like a human. The creature dragged me to the beach and put me down behind a rock. I was in a daze, but suddenly I had the feeling that Silja was with me, so I spoke to her. In the darkness I could hardly make anything out. There was a face that resembled Silja’s face, but without hair. She had a grey, black and white mottled body—like a seal.”

“Maybe you just imagined it,” Jupiter said thoughtfully. “After all, you had to deal with a blow to the head and a lack of oxygen on top of that.”

“Maybe I’m just imagining the seal figure,” Jorunn admitted, “but not what came next. The creature lowered its head and sang very softly into my ear. It was the penultimate verse of Silja’s selkie song.” She paused, as if she were gathering strength for the next sentences. Softly she said:”

*Don’t ever ask me who I am; don’t ever follow me.
Sharp teeth, grey fur, cold creature from the sea.*

“Creepy,” Pete thought.

“I don’t believe in fairy tales.” Jorunn’s voice now sounded firmer again. “Of course I have checked all logical possibilities. To sum it up briefly, there was neither research explorations nor any rescue exercises nor underwater tours for tourists in the bay after Christmas... nor did I observe any cars or boats in the area.”

“—And because at first glance there is no logical reason for your experiences, you are now assuming the selkie myth of all things?” asked Jupiter with audible doubt in his voice.

Jorunn narrowed her eyes. “To quote Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, through the character Sherlock Holmes: ‘... when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.’”

Jupiter did not let the wind be taken out of his sails that easily. “I counter that Sherlock Holmes also said that ‘... there is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact.’”

“I met a woman down there who died in the bay years before!” Jorunn suddenly sounded angry. “A woman who won’t talk to me but sings me a selkie song and then disappears back into the sea... and yes, I can’t see the forest for the trees. I am far too close to the matter to look at it rationally. However, I’m desperate for an explanation for this phenomenon. That’s why I hired you guys.”

She took a deep breath and continued quietly: “Maybe Silja is not a selkie... but there is definitely a mystery about my nanny and I want you to unravel that mystery!”

7. Dinner at the Madigans

“There’s a full moon tonight,” Jupiter noted. “When the fog lifts over the surface of the water, we should have a pretty good view of the sea from here.”

“There’s no saying anything will happen again tonight,” Bob reflected.

“A full moon!” Pete remarked. “What do you know? It’s time for bizarre occurrences.”

“Is this supposed to cheer me up or terrify me?” asked Jorunn, without giving Pete a glance.

“Let me say this,” Jupiter said soberly, “I don’t see any connection between a full moon and what you saw in the sea. From experience, there is a very manageable amount of reasons for haunting phenomena.”

“Oh yeah?”

“Yes.” Jupiter began to walk slowly up and down. “Number one—the occupants of a house or property are to be evicted for a short time or permanently.”

“We can’t rule that out,” Bob said.

“Number two is haunting for revenge,” Jupiter continued.

Jorunn gave a low snort. “My father’s enemies have quite different methods that are clearly more effective.”

“Number three is staged haunting to force a confession.”

“Unlikely in this case,” Jorunn said. “Go on.”

“It also happens from time to time that people unknowingly cause what appears to be a haunting phenomenon when doing certain work, for example, construction or research operations.”

“Sure,” Jorunn now said with undisguised irony in her voice. “My dead nanny now works as a construction worker. That explains everything.”

“I’m merely listing all the known reasons for apparently supernatural phenomena,” Jupiter replied, “and I assume that we are dealing neither with a haunting as a publicity stunt nor a haunting as a harmless prank... but other variants are certainly possible, for example, any staging aimed at unsettling, blackmailing or frightening someone.”

There was another possibility that Jupiter did not say out loud—a haunting that served to keep The Three Investigators busy. He could not rule out the possibility that Jorunn was just putting a big show for them. Should that be the case, Jorunn played her part brilliantly.

“As far as your nanny is concerned, apart from the possibility that you had hallucinations because of your near-death experience under water, there are only the following logical explanations,” the First Investigator then added. “—Either she is still alive, someone is deliberately impersonating Silja, or she has a sister who looks very much like her.”

“She was an only child and had no family left,” Jorunn said.

Jupiter stood up in front of the girl. “We need to take a closer look at the phenomenon and find out the motive behind it. My colleagues and I will discuss the exact procedure in a moment... but I think you should plan to have us as guests tonight.”

“Not me!” Pete raised his hand as if he were at school.

Jupiter and Bob spared a comment about Pete’s fear of monsters, ghosts and supernatural phenomena of all kinds. They didn’t want to embarrass their friend in front of Jorunn, but the

Second Investigator had a very different reason for not participating. "I'm invited to Kelly's house for dinner tonight. Her great-aunt is also there," he explained.

"Elenor Madigan?" gasped Bob. "Well, prepare yourself for a busy evening."

Jorunn raised an eyebrow but said nothing.

Pete, meanwhile, waved it off. "Kelly's great-aunt is a human earthquake... but you can put up with her for an hour or two when you're not solving a case for her. Anyway, I can be back here first thing in the morning. If you want, I can bring our scuba gear then."

"A good idea," Jupe thought.

"We can keep watch here at night for all I care, Jupe," Bob said. He turned to Jorunn. "— But is that even okay with you? Your nanny is in the hospital. Wouldn't you rather stay with friends or relatives?"

"I have already discussed with Deidre that you will look after me," Jorunn explained.

"Can't anyone else take care of you?" asked Pete in amazement.

"My uncle is currently in England and my father is understandably unavailable. There are still distant relatives near Santa Monica, but I prefer to stay here."

"So we're your babysitters today?" asked Bob, amused.

"I resent you using the word 'baby'." Jorunn gave him a withering look. "When in doubt, I could protect you rather than the other way round!"

"It's a deal then," Jupiter said. "Pete will go to Rocky Beach and Bob and I will hold down the fort at your father's office."

"Well, if it isn't Pete!" Kelly's great-aunt jumped up from her chair and came rushing towards the Second Investigator with her skirts flowing.

Aunt Elenor's dress could easily have passed for a princess costume. It was trimmed with light blue and silver sequins. Over it floated a semi-transparent cape with a pattern of snowflakes woven into it. The only thing missing was a little crown. That, however, was already worn by her lapdog Muffins. The little pooch yelped as Aunt Elenor gave Pete a peck on the cheek. "How are Jupiter and Rob?"

"Bob," Pete corrected quietly. "They're good, thank you."

"Nice to finally see you again!" Kelly's father greeted the Second Investigator.

"Thank you," Pete murmured as he wiped the pink lipstick from his cheek.

He hadn't been to the Madigans' for over two months. Kelly and Pete had been together for quite a while, but with breaks on and off. Kelly felt that Pete was more often out with Jupiter and Bob or his surfing buddies than with her—and this was true. When it got too much for her, she broke up with him. The fact that they kept becoming a couple despite this was probably because they really liked each other and were a perfect match. Kelly was the leader of the cheerleaders and Pete was the high school sports ace.

"My parents told me to give you their best regards," Pete said politely. In fact, the Crenshaws were quite pleased that Pete had been invited to Kelly's house.

The Madigans were wealthy and enjoyed a good reputation in Rocky Beach. Mr Madigan was a successful businessman who was interested in western riding in his spare time. Ever since he learned that the boys were investigators, he took a keen interest in their work.

"Well, are you three on another exciting case right now?" he asked as soon as they were sitting at the dining table.

"You have had some business dealings with the Greys, haven't you, Daddy?" Kelly asked.

Pete felt a twinge in his stomach. He should not have told Kelly about this. Their investigations were confidential after all, and when it came to Mr Grey, it was better not to reveal too much. However, Mr Madigan was already looking up curiously from his plate.

Aunt Elenor also sat bolt upright. "Not the infamous Greys?"

"Yes, it's them," Kelly said.

"How interesting," exclaimed Aunt Elenor. "Tell me about it!"

Pete hesitated briefly. "Our client is the daughter of Michael Grey."

"Ah, Michael." Mr Madigan mashed a potato with his fork. "He was a very good business partner, not as aloof and extravagant as his brother. I must confess I held him in high regard until he was suddenly arrested. That really shook me up."

"Understandable," Pete said. He shoved a large piece of steak into his mouth. If he chewed, at least he wasn't expected to talk.

"The rumour mill was naturally bubbling after the arrest," Elenor Madigan reported. Her cheeks reddened slightly. "I was horrified at what these people—"

"Dear Aunt Elenor, we don't talk business at the dining table," Mr Madigan said gently.

"You started it," she replied, "and it was a deeply dramatic development for me too! I'm also a neighbour of Michael Grey—at least as the crow flies."

"Malibu is just a short distance from Lorca Bay after all," Kelly's mother interjected.

"It was clear that you would have to play everything down again," said Aunt Elenor shrilly. "Please! Suddenly there was talk of illegal business, of gangland connections and even fights, and I was as good as in the middle of it."

"I see," Pete said tensely.

Kelly also seemed to be thinking about how to change the subject. However, her great-aunt did not give her the chance.

"I especially remember that terrible attack! The poor woman! Such a pretty thing! Far too young to die. I met her at the Dwights' summer party... and a few weeks later, she was dead!"

"That's right, unfortunately." Mrs Madigan nodded. "That was just before Michael was arrested."

"I'm telling you, it was dramatic!" Aunt Elenor had completely forgotten about the food on her plate. "I heard and saw the explosion live! I saw the plumes of smoke in the sky from my garden. I knew immediately that something terrible had happened!"

"The attack was clearly meant for Michael Grey!" said Mr Madigan firmly. "After all, he had made enemies of many business people."

Kelly energetically brushed a strand of her long hair out of her face. "I'm going to rehearse a new programme with the cheerleaders after the holidays!"

"Very nice," Mr Madigan said and turned his attention back to his steak.

"Yes, really," Mrs Madigan agreed.

Pete felt compelled to comment as well. "Great!"

Kelly's eyes narrowed. "Oh yeah?"

"I wasn't being ironic!" the Second Investigator defended himself. He stuffed another bite of steak into his mouth.

Tomorrow he would ask Jorunn about her father's enemies. Until then, he would try to make a good impression on the Madigans and not upset Kelly.

Night was falling over Lorca Bay. In the course of the evening, the fog had completely disappeared. A huge full moon stood over the coast.

Jorunn handed the boys several blankets and pillows. "You are free to move about the house and may take food from the fridge. However, you are not allowed to go upstairs. This area is off-limits to outsiders, and I will defend accordingly if necessary."

Bob was tempted to ask if Jorunn slept with an arsenal of different weapons under the bed... but actually, he preferred not to know.

The girl opened a door that branched off from the basement office. Behind it was a small bathroom. "Fresh towels are in the cupboard next to the sink."

"An office with its own bathroom, not bad." Bob peered into the small room.

"If you want to know for sure, before my father set up his office down here, this basement was used as a gym by my mother." Jorunn turned off the light. "I'm going to retire now. Good night."

Jupiter and Bob set up their air mattresses in front of the oval window. Rays of white moonlight shone on the kelp forest that spread out before them. They had deliberately not switched on the outside spotlights. Only a dimmed lamp shone in the office. They would switch that off later as well.

"What do you think of the case?" asked Bob.

"An exciting challenge," said Jupiter. At the same time he handed Bob a note:

Watch what you say. We might be bugged. We can't trust Jorunn.

Bob nodded. Then he opened a folder he had received from Jorunn. It contained all the documents Michael Grey had possessed about Silja Beroe. "Maybe I'll find a clue in here."

"I have already skimmed the documents, I think there is only little information in them," Jupiter said.

The First Investigator looked around the room attentively. He had just examined the pencil drawings, now he was examining the large window.

"Silja Beroe had a Social Security number," Bob said a few minutes later. "—And she previously worked for a family in Montana. She had also successfully completed a first aid course for children." He glanced at a copy of a certificate. "That doesn't sound supernatural."

"Just a normal nanny," Jupiter said.

"Leaving aside the fact that she reappeared the night before last singing selkie songs," Bob said.

"I don't understand the purpose of the song either," Jupiter said. "To me it looks like someone is trying to scare Jorunn off."

"Well, that didn't work. She hired us and is dying to know what happened in the sea."

"Sometimes a certain course of action gets you the opposite of what you intended," Jupiter pointed out. "That also applies to criminals."

"Maybe someone wants Jorunn to go on a search." Bob stepped to the large window and looked out to sea.

"For what purpose?"

"I don't know. It could be... Jupe! There's something!" Bob squinted his eyes. The seaweed was caught in a current, revealing a view of something grey. "I see the reef! And—" He didn't finish the sentence.

A light grey creature floated through the green plants. It had huge dark eye sockets, almost like a skull. Bob blinked. Already the creature had disappeared... and so had the reef, which was now hidden behind the dense kelp fronds again.

"That was a seal." Jupiter folded his arms.

"Are you quite sure?"

“What else could it be?”

“It looked scary.”

“Your imagination is playing tricks on you,” Jupiter explained. “We’re talking about selkies and at this moment you see a seal. Of course your brain is trying to make a connection.”

“Maybe...” Bob realized he was tired—far too tired to keep a clear head. “I’m going to the bathroom for a minute.”

Bob stood at the sink and ran cold water over his hands. He looked in the mirror. The outline of his own head was visible. Behind it, through the open bathroom door, was the oval window to the sea, where blue water, moonlight, and seaweed could be seen. Involuntarily, he remembered a sentence he had learned from his father while driving—objects in the mirror are closer than they seem.

Bob suddenly felt defenceless. He closed the bathroom door and switched on the light. Then he splashed his face with cold water as well. He looked in the mirror again. This time he saw only himself and the door.

The threatening feeling subsided. He dried himself with a fluffy white towel, took a deep breath in and out and went back to the office.

8. Danger Among the Seaweed

The fog had lifted. The Southern Californian coast was revealed in all its glory—sparkling water, blue sky, rough rocks, stony beaches and palm and pine trees tousled by the wind.

The Three Investigators had sought a sheltered spot by the sea to confer. The events of last night were quickly summarized by Bob: “The vigil was uneventful.”

Jupiter was in a correspondingly bad mood. “Once again, we haven’t made a single step forward.”

“Maybe I can contribute something,” Pete said. He reported what the Madigans had told him. Bob listened with interest while a steep wrinkle formed on Jupiter’s forehead.

“Anyway, they think that someone from organized crime wanted to murder Jorunn’s father,” Pete concluded.

“You spoke to Kelly’s father about our investigation?” asked Jupiter irritably.

“He knows we’re investigators.” Pete ducked his head a little.

Jupiter energetically threw a stone into the water. “He did business with the Greys!”

“Because he’s a businessman. Do you think that was dirty business? Maybe even that Mr Madigan is a criminal?” Pete looked at his friend incredulously.

“I’m not implying anything,” Jupiter said, “but we have to be careful when we talk about our cases.”

“I know that,” Pete said, “but honestly, I found out more than you did yesterday! Mrs Madigan might even have taken a photo of Silja Beroe at a summer party. She promised to look for it! And if we want to check out the Greys’ enemies, we already have someone to talk to.”

Jupiter calmed down a little again. “It’s all right, but I hope we can manage without involving the Madigans. I suggest that Bob do another round of research today. Maybe we can find out who tried to harm Michael Grey. I also need more information on Silja Beroe. Where did she come from? What traces did she leave behind in Montana? Who knew her?”

“So what do we do?” Pete wanted to know... but he already knew the answer. After all, in the boot of the Tesla was the diving equipment that he himself had brought from Rocky Beach.

“We’ll go diving,” Jupe decided, “and afterwards we’ll apologize to Mrs Planter for the break-in.”

“We apologize?” asked Bob, puzzled.

“Yes, so we can talk to her.” Jupiter stood up. “—Because the task to talk to the neighbour is not yet ticked off.”

Half an hour later, Jupiter and Pete went into the cool waters of the Pacific.

The Second Investigator shivered not only because of the temperatures. Swimming among the seaweed was an exciting thing, but not without danger. They had to be careful not to get caught in the long fronds. Moreover, in the middle of the kelp forest, visibility was limited. They could only recognize dangers late in the game. Pete knew that seals were one of these dangers. The animals were cute and playful, but ultimately they were predators with

sharp teeth and powerful jaws. If they felt threatened, they could attack. There were even cases of people being fatally injured in the process.

Pete tried to suppress thoughts of diving accidents and followed Jupiter. After only a few minutes, the two investigators were in the middle of the kelp. A bright orange damselfish swam past and disappeared behind a rock in a flash.

Finally they reached the reef. It was smaller than expected, but beautiful to look at. Waving seaweed grew on the rocks, and in between, the boys discovered sea urchins, crabs, starfish and mussels.

Jupiter swam closer. He pointed to several places where the animals and plants had been removed from the rocks. It looked as if someone had gone over them in a big way with an axe. Remains of sea urchins and small pieces of rock lay scattered on the ground. Whatever Jorunn had seen through the window in her father's office, now there was evidence that someone had been here.

Jupe swam around the rock. Pete examined the sea bed. He found scratch and drag marks here. Jorunn didn't believe in treasure, but this looked like someone had been looking for something.

All of a sudden it became restless in the underwater forest. It was as if a storm was brewing. The huge seaweed plants swirled around in the water, fish shot off in all directions and a huge shadow loomed over the Second Investigator. He looked up, startled.

A boat! Jupiter had swum once around the small reef in the meantime and was back with him. The First Investigator also looked up and signalled to Pete to take cover on the rock.

Now the boys could see that the boat was not very big. Maybe it was a fishing boat or an excursion boat. Still, they had to be careful. The boat's propeller was churning up the water and making visibility in the kelp forest even worse than before.

It looked as if the boat had stopped. Before the boys could think about it, something plunged into the water. It was a huge grey grappling arm like that of a hydraulic excavator. At the end of it was the grapple bucket with huge iron teeth. The thing disappeared between the fronds of seaweed. Now the fish were getting really restless. Sand swirled up.

Jupiter raised his arms protectively but Pete saw in horror that the thing was coming straight at them. The grapple bucket moved across the bottom, taking everything with it. If the two boys didn't want to end up being grabbed by the bucket, they had to get out of here urgently!

Pete turned around and tried to show Jupiter what he was going to do by hand signals, but Jupiter wasn't looking at him. An icy shock ran through the Second Investigator. While fleeing from the grappling arm, Jupiter had got caught between several kelp fronds. The harder he struggled, the worse he got tangled!

Bob closed his laptop in frustration. It was like chasing a phantom. Silja Beroe had definitely lived, but she had left hardly any traces in the process. There were no photos of her, no friends, no relatives—only a grave in a cemetery near Gabriello Heights.

Suddenly, Bob heard hurried footsteps in the corridor. Jorunn came up to him. She had been watching the diving action from the window in the basement. Had Jupiter and Pete discovered something?

Bob jumped to his feet. "Is everything all right?"

"No! Come with me," was all the girl said.

Bob followed her out and through a door at the side of the house. Here, after a few metres, the Greys' property merged into an expanse of rugged coastal rock.

Jorunn ran to a metal staircase that apparently led down into a small rocky gorge—at least that's what it looked like at first glance.

As Bob got closer, he realized that the gap between the rocks was filled with seawater. The Greys had set up a sheltered harbour here. There was just enough space for a small jetty with two water scooters. Apparently Jorunn wanted to ride it. She climbed onto the seat of one of the watercrafts and untied the line. “Now come on!”

“What's wrong?”

“You'll see!” Jorunn was already starting the engine. Bob had barely taken his seat behind her when the water scooter accelerated and whizzed between the rocks towards the bay. Water splashed up. Bob grabbed Jorunn tightly on her shoulders so he wouldn't tip over backwards.

As they sped across the water, Bob finally saw what had got Jorunn so excited. A vessel was moored in Lorca Bay. It was a kind of cutter, but it was not equipped with fishing nets. Instead, it had an arm with a grapple bucket—similar to an excavator mounted on a truck. The grappling arm was in operation and was reaching into the water.

Jorunn headed straight for the cutter... and she was not the only one. A boat with an outboard motor was also heading straight for the cutter. At the helm was Mrs Planter. Her face was contorted into an angry grimace.

As she came closer, Bob could hear her yelling something, but the words were lost in the noise of the engines. Just then the grappling arm rose from the water. A huge bucket full of seaweed emerged.

Mrs Planter slowed her pace, then grabbed a megaphone. “Stop it now!” her voice now amplified through the bay. “Stop it! Or I'll call the police!”

Shortly afterwards, a man appeared at the railing of the cutter. “Take it easy, I'm just doing my job here!”

“Your machine is not suitable for this work!” Mrs Planter continued.

Jorunn braked. The water scooter danced restlessly on the waves. “You don't have a permit to harvest kelp here!” she shouted.

“Do you have any idea what destruction you are causing with this primitive monster?” roared Mrs Planter.

“Like I said, I'm just doing my job!” the man defended himself.

“I am Jorunn Grey, the occupant of this land,” Jorunn yelled, “so you are on my property!”

“Ha! I won't let a cheeky brat and an old witch tell me what to do!”

Mrs Planter was now standing upright in the boat. She was swaying quite a bit, which was obviously not only due to the swell. “You are breaking many laws!”

“Who do you work for?” Jorunn asked the boatman in a cutting voice.

“For a Mr Sanders. I have it in writing,” the man thundered back. “I'm to remove the seaweed in Largo Bay.”

“Largo Bay?” Jorunn burst out. “This is not Largo Bay!”

“Exactly!” cried Mrs Planter. “This is Lorca Bay! Lorca not Largo, you fool!”

The man laughed. “You'll have to prove that first. I'll take care of my assignment until then. Get lost!” He grabbed the control unit with which he steered the grappling arm.

The next moment, the arm lowered again into the water.

9. A Visit to the Cemetery

Jorunn pulled a mobile phone out of her pocket. “I’m not calling the police, I’m calling my people, and then it will get very uncomfortable here very quickly!”

Mrs Planter gave Jorunn an admiring look and raised her megaphone to her mouth again. “Those guys from the Greys will flatten you! If you’re lucky, you can paddle out of the bay on the wreckage of your vessel!”

The man nervously pushed his cap out of his forehead. Bob had the impression that he took the threat seriously. Was this a sign that it was not a misunderstanding at all? Did the man know who he was getting involved with?

The boatman hesitated. Then he slapped the flat of his hand on the railing. “Fine. I’m getting out of here... but beware! If I ever meet you in a harbour bar, I’ll flatten you instead!”

“Good luck with the attempt,” Jorunn said icily.

“Get lost!” hissed Mrs Planter.

Jupiter stared at the massive teeth of the grapple bucket. He tore at the plant that held him. His foot had got caught somewhere between the fronds, and now his left arm was stuck too.

The First Investigator closed his eyes. Think! Stay calm! In a moment, the monster would seize him and hurl him against the reef. He needed a plan.

Then something grabbed him by the shoulder. The First Investigator opened his eyes.

Pete! He held a diving knife in his hand. He could cut through the plants with it—if there was time.

Jupiter was justifiably worried. The grappling arm was faster than Pete. The teeth were only two metres away in front of them. However, Pete paid no attention to the threat, instead he slashed the kelp with all his might.

Suddenly, the fully loaded bucket rose and was raised out of the water. Pete finished cutting his friend’s arm free and pulled him away. Jupe began to swim away immediately. Now it was a matter of getting back to land as quickly as possible!

It took a few minutes, then the cutter turned and set course for the open sea.

Jorunn steered the water scooter next to her neighbour’s boat. “Thank you.”

“I’m not going to let them ruin this bay!” Mrs Planter plopped down on her seat.

“This has gone too far,” Jorunn added.

Mrs Planter waved it off. “It’s not that important. The main thing is that we have saved our kelp forest. It’s the habitat of many species of plants and animals. I used to be a marine biologist.”

“I know, Mrs Planter,” said Jorunn, “but who could have an interest in harvesting the kelp here—and then do it in such a destructive way?”

“The food industry is all wild about kelp.” Mrs Planter said. “It doesn’t matter, anyway. I have enough problems of my own.”

“Ma’am,” Bob intervened before Mrs Planter could go off. “May we come over to your place later? We’d like to apologize to you.”

Only now did Mrs Planter notice Bob. She shook her head vigorously. "Stay off my property! I can't deal with intruders."

Jorunn looked at Bob in amazement.

"It was a misunderstanding," Bob made another attempt.

However Mrs Planter remained stubborn. "I don't want any visitors!" With these words, she started the outboard boat engine and sped away.

Jorunn put two steaming mugs of tea in front of the boys without being asked. They had hung up their diving suits in the bathroom and were now sitting in the Greys' bright kitchen.

"It was neither a misunderstanding nor a coincidence," Bob said. "The man was lying. There is no Largo Bay in California and I would be very surprised if he really got a contract from a Mr Sanders."

"I think so too," Jupiter said. He was still a little pale around the nose. "Kelp is harvested in an environmentally friendly way here in California, not with such brutal methods. Either we were targeted or someone wanted to remove the kelp without permission."

"Maybe to have a better view," Pete pondered, "in the search for something..."

"Are you talking about treasure again?" asked Jorunn.

"We can pretty much assume that a search operation took place in the underwater forest," Jupiter said. "The indications speak for it. If this was fruitless, the removal of the plants is a logical follow-up action. The kelp fronds restrict visibility in the water considerably."

"But what on earth are they looking for there?" asked Jorunn. "—And who is behind it?"

"It is possible that Silja Beroe has made a discovery," Jupiter said, "and now she's returning to get it... which assumes she's not dead."

Jorunn shook her head. "No, she wouldn't do that! And why would she return now, after all these years?"

"Your father will soon be out of prison," Bob reflected.

"In two months," Jorunn replied, "and that's been known for a while too."

"Do you know of any special plans your uncle might have?" asked Jupiter.

"I stay out of his business," Jorunn said. "As far as I know, he is in England to take care of our family's residence. Besides, he celebrates New Year's Eve in London every year."

"Why aren't you there?"

"I have a busy schedule with private lessons, studying, sports and social appointments. Around the turn of the year, I allow myself a little time off. I don't want to spend it in a country where people drive on the wrong side of the road and think beans in tomato sauce is a proper breakfast."

"We're not getting anywhere like this." Bob stood up. "If you'll let me take the car, I'd like to drive over to the cemetery and look at Silja Beroe's grave. Maybe I'll find a clue there."

"It's a headstone, nothing more." Jorunn put the empty teacups in the sink. "And a buried urn full of ashes."

"I can take a side trip to the *Los Angeles Times* office afterwards," Bob offered further. "With the information I already have, I might be able to find out something new from the archives there."

Jorunn shrugged his shoulders. "Go ahead... Knowledge is power—I've said that before, but I doubt the *Los Angeles Times* archives know any more than I do."

"I'll give it a shot," Bob said.

Jorunn sat back down at the table. "Pick a car, I'll give you the key."

The cemetery of Gabriello Heights was on a small hill, only a few kilometres from the sea.

Bob had parked the car in the car park and was now searching the rows of gravestones. A warm breeze brushed over his head. Bob winced. Yet the sudden warmth was not at all unexpected. The weather news had announced that the Santa Ana winds would again bring warm weather to Southern California. That was nothing unusual at this time of year. Nevertheless, the wind caused him to feel strange.

Something rustled behind him. Bob turned around. There were no other visitors in the cemetery apart from him. The wind was only pushing a few dry leaves around.

On a spacious lawn, Bob finally found what he was looking for. A small white headstone was inscribed with Silja Beroe's name, date of birth and death. Someone had placed a flower in front of it. Bob bent down. It was not freshly cut, but not yet withered—so someone had visited the grave recently. Could it be Jorunn?

Bob pulled out his notepad and made a drawing of the headstone. He could have taken a photo, but that didn't seem appropriate. After all, it was a cemetery.

After he had recorded all the details on paper, he went back to the car. Another car was now parked there—a black limousine. Bob was about to pass when the driver's door opened.

“Hello, Bob.”

Bob was startled, stopped and turned around. Special Agent Ross got out from the car.

“Good day, sir!” Bob replied.

Now the passenger door opened as well and Special Agent Wright stepped into the sunlight. The warm wind ran through her blow-dried hair. Otherwise, she looked like a mannequin again today—perfect make-up, expensive glasses, an impeccably fitting grey trouser suit and a facial expression without any emotion.

“The weather is changing.” Ross looked up at the sky. “Did you know that the Santa Ana winds are also called ‘Devil’s Breath’?”

Bob looked at the man incredulously. Surely the FBI agents had not come to talk to him about the weather.

Meanwhile, the woman pointed to the back seat. “Why don’t you be so kind and sit with us in the car for a moment?”

“Why?” asked Bob.

“We want to discuss something with you.”

“What?”

“You’ll find out in a minute.”

Bob felt a slight headache. Maybe it was just the warm downdraughts, or maybe it was the tension. Surely he had nothing to fear from the agents, but he would feel much more comfortable with Jupiter and Pete at his side. The First Investigator was not so easily intimidated by anything.

Slowly, Bob got into the back seat of the limousine. The interior smelled of fresh leather and a subtle perfume.

“So, how can I help you?” asked Bob as the agents closed the car doors. They were both sitting in the front, but turned to face him.

“Jorunn Grey hired you,” Special Agent Ross stated.

“I don’t know if I’m allowed to talk about it,” Bob said.

“Oh, we know what it’s about. She wants you to solve a mysterious case for her.” Special Agent Ross looked at Bob triumphantly.

“Who told you that?” asked Bob. He rubbed his palms against his jeans. “Are you behind the selkies in the bay?”

“Selkies?” the man said. He looked genuinely surprised. “What’s that?”

“Mythical creatures...” Bob explained. “Uh... seal people...”

“Seal people?” Special Agent Ross laughed out. “Well, that explains the strange things we’ve been intercepting.”

Special Agent Wright took a packet of cigarettes out of her handbag.

“Peyton!” Ross admonished his colleague.

The woman ignored him and turned only briefly to Bob. “I hope you don’t mind if I smoke.”

“Uh...” Bob uttered, but the agent was already pulling out a lighter.

“So, Bob, we have a court order that allows us to tap the Greys’ phone,” Ross explained as his colleague blew a puff of smoke into the air. “That’s the source of our most important information.”

Peyton Wright nodded. “Jorunn spoke to your friend Jupiter on the phone the day before yesterday. He promised that the three of you would take care of the case.”

“So you’re investigating the Greys,” Bob said slowly.

“We can’t tell you much about our investigation,” Special Agent Ross replied.

“What about the strange selkie apparition in the bay?”

“Looking for mythical creatures is definitely not part of our area of investigations.”

“As far as I know, the army trains seals for special missions,” Bob stated.

“Seals are not mythical creatures, and we are not the army. We are federal law enforcement officers,” Ross said.

“But now to you, The Three Investigators...” Special Agent Wright flipped open a folder and pulled out a printed sheet of paper. “First Investigator—Jupiter Justus Jones,” she read out. “Orphan, resident of Rocky Beach... Second Investigator—Peter Dunstan Crenshaw, also resident of Rocky Beach... and then you—Robert Andrews, known as Bob. You’re in charge of records and research, aren’t you?”

Bob said nothing. What for? The agents were already well-informed. He listened as the officers read out a whole series of further details about the three of them and their families.

“The file paints a positive picture,” Special Agent Wright summarized. “Inspector Cotta seems to think highly of you and your friends. However, a telephone conversation with another colleague of ours revealed that, at times, you have little regard for the law during your investigations.”

“Who did you talk to?” asked Bob.

“It doesn’t matter,” Special Agent Ross replied instead of his colleague. His smile had disappeared. “We then took a look behind the scenes and found a few things—trespassing, illegal lock picking, forced entries into private properties, reckless driving, withholding of information and evidence from authorities... shall I go on?”

Bob had turned pale. “There’s nothing about that in the files,” he said meekly.

“Strange, isn’t it?” Now Special Agent Ross smiled again. “You’d think the police had forgotten a few details.”

“So? I can’t deny that we had to take some unconventional approaches,” Bob admitted, “but it is not as serious as you put it.”

“Not as serious?” Special Agent Ross remarked. “Really? Well, that’s subject to interpretation.”

“What do you want from us?” asked Bob quietly.

Special Agent Wright looked at her colleague. She took a drag on her cigarette. "Tell him."

The man looked piercingly at Bob. "We would like to use your investigation services."

10. An Assignment for Bob

Bob didn't know what to say. First, The Three Investigators got an assignment from Mr Grey's niece, and now one from the FBI! At that moment, he would have much rather solved one of those cases involving missing pets or door bell pranks. Stolen sunflowers were basically great too!

"As I have said, we can't tell you much about our investigation," Special Agent Ross continued, "but we want to get some documents withheld by the Greys. We suspect that they are evidences that could be used against gangland syndicates in court."

Peyton Wright sighed: "The IRS guys might be able to get the Greys for tax evasion, but this other matter belongs in the hands of the FBI."

"Then why are you asking us of all people?" asked Bob. His mouth was dry. "We are junior amateur investigators. It's certainly not legal for us to search the Greys' house for you... and could you even use the evidence in court if we found it?"

"Let us worry about that," Special Agent Ross said.

"We have no more time to plant an undercover investigator in the house. You, on the other hand, have already gained Jorunn's trust."

"Have we?" Bob wasn't quite sure.

"The girl wants you to clear up this fairy tale nonsense. In return, you have access to the Greys' house." Ross looked confident. "Michael Grey was his brother's archivist. Our investigation has revealed that he created numerous archives—all carefully hidden and protected by some elaborate security mechanism. Unfortunately, the clues are unclear. What is certain is that at least one of the archives is connected to the underwater forest. Intercepted telephone calls suggest that the hiding place is in a room with a sea view and possibly behind a picture or photo of an underwater landscape."

"So there is a connection between the crimes you want to uncover and the kelp?" Bob wanted to know.

"We have incomplete information, unfortunately," Ross admitted, "but it looks that way."

Bob leaned back. "Then the archive could be in the bay after all. Have you already sent a team of divers to the underwater forest?"

"Yes, four years ago," said Special Agent Wright. She stubbed out the cigarette butt in the car's ashtray.

"After the attack on the yacht and the arrest of Michael Grey, the entire bay was systematically searched," Ross added. "We found nothing."

"Has the FBI conducted dives in the bay in the last few days?" Bob enquired.

"No," Special Agent Ross replied. "We are concentrating on searching for specific documents at the moment. Michael Grey loves the sea, but we know he hasn't been diving for many years due to health problems. He would never keep important documents in a place he couldn't access."

"Do his enemies know that too?" Bob asked.

"Bob, unfortunately we cannot speak openly with you because we have to protect our sources of information. However, you can be sure that we have thought through and planned

our mission for you well. However, please don't tell your colleagues about it for the time being."

Bob looked at the agent incredulously. "But—"

"Look for something related to the underwater forest, perhaps it is in the room with a sea view in the Greys' house." Special Agent Ross looked piercingly at Bob. "Look for a photograph, a painted picture, a sculpture or maybe an aquarium. Then find out what mechanism protects the hiding place."

Special Agent Wright nodded. "According to our sources, the documents we are looking for is protected by a code that has something to do with the four classical elements... you know—earth, water, air and fire. In addition, you need 'two elements at body temperature' to get to the hiding place, whatever that means."

"That sounds strange," Bob remarked.

"As far as I can tell, it fits the Greys," said Special Agent Wright.

"And I'm not allowed to talk my two friends about it?" Bob asked.

"Only if you can't make progress on your own and after we give approval. So wait for our instructions on that. We'll stay in touch with you by phone. We're afraid that Pete is a security risk because he could blab, and Jupiter Jones is considered very headstrong. He might have problems carrying our requests."

Bob knew that Ross was right, at least as far as Jupiter was concerned.

"You go back to the Greys' property and start searching as inconspicuously as possible," Ross said. "If you come across any of Grey's archives, or even anything that resembles what we described to you, contact us immediately. We will give you a mobile number, which you will save under the name 'Sandy Miller'. The documents must not get to wrong hands!"

"Why should I do this for you?" Bob protested.

"It's also in your own interest," Special Agent Wright added. "Any information about Grey's empire is a danger to those who know it. Situations like this could even cause people to enter a witness protection programme—not that it will happen to you."

"Can I refuse this assignment?" Bob swallowed.

The two FBI agents paused and looked at each other. Then Special Agent Ross said: "Let's put it this way... We have enough information about you guys that... how shall I put it... what we have could be detrimental to your... impressive hobby... in other words, we could—"

"What?" Bob exclaimed. "Are you trying to—"

"Hold on! Perhaps, I could explain to you in another way," Special Agent Wright interrupted Bob before the conversation went out of hand. "You are already well-positioned in this operation. Time is of the essence, and as explained, we cannot find another person so well-placed to do this. In any case, we will be in constant contact with you. If you face any dangerous situations, we will pull you out."

"... Moreover your agency's motto is: 'We Investigate Anything,'" Ross said coolly.

Bob fell silent. He was in a state of complete confusion and disorder.

"Here is the number for 'Sandy Miller,'" Ross continued, "and if there are no more questions, you can now leave."

"Are you all right?" asked Pete as he opened the door for Bob.

"Uh... I'm not feeling well," Bob replied.

Pete closed the door behind his friend. "Full moon is the best time for ghosts and demons to appear."

“You’d better be afraid of other things.” Bob looked around. “Where is Jupe?”

“He’s making blueberry muffins right now.”

Bob snorted. “I thought we have a case?”

“We do, but Deidre just came back from the hospital in a taxi. She asked for muffins. We found a baking mix, but the Greys’ housekeeper is off until New Year and Jorunn doesn’t know how to bake.”

“The baking mix says exactly what to do.” Bob ran his hand through his blond hair.

“Jorunn can’t expect Jupe to do it for her, can she?”

“I’d say the kid’s got a full grip on our First Investigator.” Pete grinned. “They’re probably both from the same genetic experiment, but Jorunn is the improved version—faster, leaner, more dominant, but less hungry.”

“Pete, you read too many comic books.” Bob walked past his friend into the kitchen.

Jupiter was just about to take something out of the oven. “I’m not sure if the experiment was successful.”

“What are you doing back here so soon?” asked Jorunn. It sounded like a reproach.

“I was at the cemetery and now I have a headache,” Bob explained. “I’d like to take some medication and lie down for a while. I’ll be all right in an hour.”

“Whatever.” Jorunn went to a cabinet, took out a bottle of tablets and handed one to Bob.

“Thank you,” said Bob. He had the feeling that Jupiter was watching him intently. It was lucky that the First Investigator was not able to read minds.

Bob took a glass of water and left the kitchen. His air mattress was still downstairs in Mr Grey’s office. Bob stowed the tablet in his backpack and merely drank the water. Then he looked around the room. It was quite likely that this was the ‘room with a sea view’ where he was to look for the archives.

Bob examined the frame of the large window. This, after all, was ‘connected to the underwater forest’. However, the information could also refer to something that was much less obvious. In the end, there was only one option—Bob had to search the office systematically, and if he found nothing, he would have to go to the upper rooms.

All he had to do was come up with a good excuse.

Pete offered to take two of the failed muffins to Deidre. Jorunn and Jupiter were left alone in the kitchen.

“Your methods are not as successful as I had hoped,” said Jorunn.

Jupiter wiped some flour off the kitchen table. “We have already been able to prove that someone was indeed in the bay and tampered with the reef... and we will investigate the suspicion that something was being searched there. In addition, we are checking how the events are connected to Silja Beroe.”

“By cleaning the kitchen?” asked Jorunn.

“I can think while I’m doing it—provided you let me,” Jupiter replied. “When you want to solve a case as an investigator, it’s like a tangled ball of wool. You look for one thread to start with, and then you slowly unravel the rest. Until you find that one thread, the work can be quite frustrating at times.”

“Do you at least have a theory?”

“Of course,” Jupiter said. “I always have a theory, but I’m afraid you won’t like my theory.”

“The truth is not always pleasant,” Jorunn agreed with him.

“The poet Thomas Gray wrote: ‘Ignorance is bliss’.” Jupe shook out the rag over the sink.

Jorunn looked at him unbelievably. “I can’t imagine you share that opinion. You spend much of your life searching for the truth.”

“—And I know I can handle the truth,” Jupe said, “but are you ready to deal with the fact that you may have been deceived and betrayed?”

“By Silja?” Jorunn’s voice suddenly sounded cutting.

“Silja was cremated and her ashes buried,” Jupiter said as he put down the rag. “Opening a grave rarely brings peace.”

“Uncertainty does not bring peace either.” The girl stood bolt upright in front of the First Investigator. “Silja would never betray me. That’s for sure! You solve the case and leave the rest to me.”

“Are you all right?” Pete came into the kitchen with an empty plate.

“No, nothing is right. I want to see some results tomorrow morning!” said Jorunn. “Until then, I’ll be in my study.”

Bob had searched the entire office and then set his sights on the small bathroom. He had gone through drawers, tapped walls, opened a bottle of seaweed shower gel, looked in the toilet cistern, examined the shower head and taken the pencil drawings in the office off the wall. In the process, he had not found the slightest hint of hidden documents or anything like it.

He looked out through the oval window into the sea. The agents had assured him that the FBI had not sent divers into the bay in the last few days. Yet someone had been looking for something right there. It might be a coincidence, but Bob had the feeling that the strange divers and the kelp destroyer ultimately had the same goal as the agents and The Three Investigators. Everything was connected—the underwater forest, Silja Beroe, the divers, and the hidden documents. He would have loved to talk to Jupe and Pete about it.

Bob breathed in and out deeply. Then he made a determined face—he would tell his friends about the FBI agents... but not while Jorunn was around. That could put everyone in unnecessary danger.

“We’re going back to Rocky Beach!”

Bob turned around. Jupiter had entered the office unnoticed.

“Shouldn’t we rather investigate here?” Bob asked. This turn of events was anything but convenient for him.

“I need to think in peace,” Jupiter replied, “and I can do that best at Headquarters. Besides, we should look into Silja Beroe in more detail.”

“We could look for clues here in the house,” Bob suggested.

“Jorunn won’t let us.” Jupiter stepped up beside his friend. A bright red damselfish just twitched past the boys at eye level, but Jupiter paid no attention to the fish. “She even strictly forbade us to go to the first floor.”

“Interesting,” Bob said.

“We can get new information in Rocky Beach at our leisure and then come back here first thing in the morning,” Jupiter decided. “I have already discussed this with Jorunn.”

Bob nodded, yet he did not agree at all with the proposal. He had a mission and Jupiter’s plan would thwart it!

11. A Photograph of Silja Beroe

After dropping Jupiter off at the salvage yard, Pete drove Bob home. Bob wanted to drive to Los Angeles in his own car and go to the newspaper archives again.

Pete thought Bob seemed unusually nervous. He nibbled his fingernails during the drive, answered in monosyllables and hurriedly got out of the car when Pete stopped in front of the Andrews family home. The Second Investigator suspected it was the headache. The Santa Ana winds could really get to anyone. Hopefully Kelly was in a better mood than Bob.

After initial hesitation, the Second Investigator had been given the task by Jupiter of finding out more about the Greys' business connections from Mr Madigan and checking with Kelly's mother to see if she had found a photo of Silja Beroe.

Kelly and her mother were sitting on the terrace. The leaves of the eucalyptus trees rustled in the warm wind. A few of them danced through the air and landed in the pool. It was hard to believe that just a short time ago, there had been a cold, grey misty atmosphere.

"I actually found what I was looking for..." Mrs Madigan held out a printed photo to Pete.

It showed a much younger Kelly in a yellow dress. In the background was a lawn with white parasols. A woman was bending down to a little girl. Pete narrowed his eyes. The little girl was Jorunn at four or five years old! The woman was wearing an old-fashioned dress. Her long brown curls fell into her face. Pete nodded barely perceptibly. So this was Silja Beroe.

She really looked like a creature from a fairy tale. The Second Investigator wondered if he had met this woman before. In the end, however, too little of her face was visible in the photo. The thick eyebrows could only be guessed at, but the dark birthmark on her left cheek was clearly visible.

Pete took a snapshot of the photo with his mobile phone. Maybe Bob could enlarge the part with the nanny later.

"Pete!" Mr Madigan stepped out onto the terrace. He shook the boy's hand. "I've heard from Kelly that you have questions."

"Yes," Pete replied, "if you don't mind."

Mr Madigan looked at the shiny Rolex on his wrist. "I have some time now, so why don't you come to my office?"

"If it's all right with Kelly." Pete looked at his girlfriend.

"Of course!" said Kelly. It didn't sound ironic.

Nevertheless, Pete had a guilty conscience as he followed Mr Madigan into his office.

"Thank you for taking the time to see me, sir!" said Pete.

"Don't mention it. You're practically family." Mr Madigan smiled confidently. "What do you want to know?"

"Michael Grey is in prison... but the Greys are still doing business. Is there anyone who suffers from this?"

"What makes you think I have an answer to that?" Mr Madigan leaned back in his chair. The leather creaked.

“We are not getting anywhere with our case right now,” Pete confessed. “We just don’t know who we’re dealing with... and you mentioned that the Greys have many enemies.”

“Hundreds, I’d say.”

Pete pulled a disappointed face.

Mr Madigan continued: “Rumour has it that Michael Grey and his brother had an unfinished business with Betty Hale. I also know that they did some bad business with Calhoon Enterprises. This is a company that was firmly in the hands of a gangland organization until the owner went to prison.”

“Hmm...” Pete mumbled. The Three Investigators had a hand in Mr Calhoon’s arrest in a previous case. The other name, however, meant nothing to him. “Who is Betty Hale?”

“An influential businesswoman,” Mr Madigan explained with a sombre look. “She believes that brute force can get her anything, so she is anything but sympathetic in her business dealings. In fact, she is not particularly sophisticated in her methods. Unfortunately that doesn’t make her any less dangerous. Among business people, she is known as ‘Bloody Betty’.”

“Bloody Betty? Could she be behind the attack on the Greys’ pleasure yacht?” asked Pete.

“That is possible... and would be most heinous!” said Mr Madigan. “I don’t like violence, Pete.”

“What’s the problem between this Hale and the Greys?” Pete wanted to know.

Mr Madigan got up and stood at the window. “It was for the construction of a billion-dollar project. At first it looked like the contract would be awarded to a Betty Hale company, but then the Greys got it. What was behind it is anyone’s guess—bribery or blackmail, or perhaps simply a better offer. In any case, the yacht exploded only a few days after the contract was signed.”

“That doesn’t sound like a coincidence.”

“It’s amazing sometimes how things are connected,” Mr Madigan said thoughtfully. “Sometimes it even seems to me that there are hardly any coincidences at all.”

Mr Madigan was now becoming a little too philosophical for Pete’s taste. The Second Investigator cleared his throat. “Thank you for the information, sir!”

“You’re welcome. How’s your surfing going?”

“Good,” Pete said hesitantly, “but I hardly get to do it at the moment. The water is quite cool and we also have this case.”

“Well,” Mr Madigan said, then smiled kindly. “Kelly will be very happy if you have some time for her in between.”

“Good evening!” Bob called out as he entered Headquarters.

Jupiter was sitting at the computer reading a text about kelp harvesting methods. “How did it go?”

Bob shook his head. He had been able to find out next to nothing new about Silja Beroe. The family she had worked for in Montana had moved to Europe and the nanny didn’t seem to have a family of her own.

In fact, Bob hadn’t had much time to do more research. Special Agent Ross had called him and asked for a meeting. This time the man had come without his colleague. The conversation hadn’t exactly been long, but Ross had pressed Bob and emphasized once again that he had The Three Investigators and Inspector Cotta in his hands. The agent had then

confronted him with a new plan and he had reluctantly agreed. He clutched his head. Now the headache was real.

“Are you all right?” asked Jupe.

“Yes.” Bob waved it off. “It’s just the wind.”

Jupiter looked at him for a trace too long, but then he said: “I also find the change in weather exhausting. Sand blew in my face several times at the salvage yard and—”

At that moment, the phone rang. Jupiter picked it up, answered with the usual greeting and switched on the loudspeaker.

“I have some information for you.” Pete’s voice sounded chipper. “Are you ready?”

“Then your visit to the Madigans was successful?”

“Yes, I’ll send you a photo of Silja Beroe right away,” the Second Investigator blurted out. “I also have a name that might help us—Betty Hale, also known as ‘Bloody Betty’. The Greys snatched an important job away from her and shortly afterwards, Michael Grey’s pleasure yacht blew up.”

Jupe entered the name into the search engine. “The contractor?”

“Right,” Pete’s voice sounded from the loudspeaker.

While the Second Investigator reported on his conversation with Kelly’s father, Bob peered at the screen. There was a photo of a small, roundish woman with blond curls. She was visibly over fifty and looked like a nice aunt.

“I was looking at a photo of Bloody Betty,” Pete said at that moment. “She might be able to disguise herself as a seal, but I guarantee she won’t pass for Silja Beroe. She’s too old, too chubby, and too small. Has the photo of Silja reached you yet?”

“Wait a minute,” Jupiter said and checked. “Yes, received... and I’ve just downloaded the photo.”

“It’s the woman in the background. The one with the long hair. Maybe you can enlarge the photo.”

“That will be necessary.” Jupiter blinked. “It would be good if you took over right away, Bob.”

“Will do.”

“Great,” Pete said. “I’m off for the day then—going to the cinema with Kelly.”

The Three Investigators arranged to meet the next day, then Jupiter hung up.

“As long as you take care of the photo, Bob, I will try to find out more about this Betty Hale. Along with Mrs Planter, she is one of the few people who could play an important role in this case.”

... And the two FBI agents, Bob added in his mind.

“You can print out the enlarged photo and put it in our case file.” Jupe handed Bob a folder. Then he took his laptop from the shelf and flipped it open.

Bob looked into the folder. At the top was the printed photo of Grey’s ring. “Did you get any further with this?” He held out the photo to his friend.

“Not really,” Jupiter confessed. “Something’s missing... something like a clue I can start with.”

Bob pointed to William Grey’s ring that featured a red triangle surrounded by random squiggly lines. “What do you make of this motif on the ring.”

“I have no idea yet,” Jupiter said.

“Does it have something to do with the classical elements?” asked Bob as casually as possible.

Jupiter looked up from his laptop in surprise. “Yes, but what makes you think of that?”

“Just a hunch,” Bob said quickly. “I somehow recall that the triangle has been used as various sacred symbols, including that for the classical elements.” He was cautious not to reveal what he had learned from the FBI agents about the clues to the hiding place of Grey’s archives.

“Hmm... it’s just a plain red triangle, but let’s see what there is about the classical elements...” Jupiter then searched on the Internet. It only took him a while to get what he wanted. “Okay, listen up...

“Many ancient philosophies used a set of archetypal classical elements to explain the nature and complexity of all matter in terms of simpler ‘elements’. The word ‘element’ in this context refers to a state of matter or a type of energy or force, rather than the chemical elements of the modern periodic table. In ancient Greek philosophy, the four basic classical elements are earth, water, air, and fire. Later, aether was incorporated as the fifth element.”

“Does this get us anywhere?” Bob asked.

“Hold on!” Jupe exclaimed after he scrolled further down the web page. “Your hunch might be right, Bob! There are symbols and colours associated with each of the elements. In fact, there are different sets of symbols, for example, Platonic solids, and... guess what? Triangular symbols! Look here—the red triangle pointing up corresponds to the element ‘fire’!”

“Apart from that, a blue triangle pointing down represents ‘water’... The other two symbols are triangles with a line in the centre... so we have a yellow triangle pointing up for ‘air’, and a green triangle pointing down for ‘earth’.”

Jupiter began to pinch his lower lip. “If this is so, there should be a total of four rings for the four elements. We already know of one ring, so there could be three others! On the other hand, a plain red triangle is too common, and will not tell us much... but if the triangle had a line in the centre, then I could be sure that it is a symbol for a classical element.”

“Well, we can take note of this,” Bob quickly said before Jupiter pounced on the subject like a hungry dog on a bone. “In the meantime, there are other things to do now.” He clicked on the photo. Then he began to crop it to only show Silja Beroe.

Jupiter seemed to have forgotten that he was actually looking for information about Betty Hale. “What if Pete was right all along? What if there is a treasure that everyone is looking for?”

“The other rings?” asked Bob.

“That would shed new light on the case,” Jupiter pointed out. “It would be possible, for example, that Silja Beroe was wearing such a ring on the day of the explosion. Then again, people could assume that this ring is still at the bottom of the sea.”

Bob laughed out. “Well, I don’t know, but that would be like looking for a needle in a haystack.”

It was obvious to Jupiter that he regretted his rash theory. Normally he kept his thoughts to himself until he had solid evidence. “I still have to think about all the possibilities.”

The First Investigator turned away and shortly afterwards all that could be heard was the soft clacking of the keyboard. Bob leaned forward and looked intently at the screen. The image editing software had produced a good result.

The photo enhancement revealed the face of a pretty woman. Her eyebrows were thick, but that suited her. The birthmark on her left cheek was conspicuous, but that also suited her. The long hair was remarkable. The longer Bob looked at the photo, the more uneasy he became.

“Jupe?”

“What is it?” Jupiter interrupted his thoughts.

Suddenly Aunt Mathilda's piercing voice echoed across the salvage yard. "Juupeeterrr!"

The First Investigator groaned softly. "I'm afraid I'll have to leave you alone for a moment. My aunt is in an extremely bad mood today because Uncle Titus has bought so much stuff again."

"It's all right." Bob swallowed. "Go ahead, we'll talk later."

It was almost a quarter of an hour before Jupiter finally came back to Headquarters. "Aunt Mathilda wanted to make me work all day tomorrow! I was only able to avert that with the utmost persuasion."

"Very good." Bob had shut down the computer. He rubbed his forehead. FBI agents, hidden documents, elements... he had to think in peace.

"What did you want to talk to me about?" Jupe asked.

"It was just a stupid idea." Bob stood up abruptly. "We have a lot to do tomorrow. It's better if I get some rest before that."

"Get well soon," Jupiter said.

It sounded strange, but maybe Bob was just imagining it. He grabbed his backpack, gave his friend a quick wave and hurried out of the trailer.

12. A Huge Discovery by Pete

Deidre was sitting at the kitchen table. She had a thick plaster on her forehead and a bandaged ankle. "Good morning!"

"You're back on your feet," Pete said.

Deidre smiled. "I'm supposed to be taking it easy. After breakfast, I'll go back to bed and treat myself to a whole season of *Dracula Girls*."

Jorunn screwed up her face. "I'm afraid that if you have a concussion, watching TV is not going to help."

"At least allow me the enjoyment." Deidre said and then turned to The Three Investigators. "Would you like to join us for breakfast?"

"Gladly, and we might as well make ourselves useful," Bob said with a sideways glance at Jorunn, who was standing perplexed in front of the fridge.

Ten minutes later, everyone was sitting at the table. Bob poured steaming tea into the cups and Jupe passed around a basket of warm slices of toast.

Jorunn did not ask about the progress in their investigation. It was likely that she wanted to wait until Deidre had gone back into her room. Jupiter therefore preferred to remain silent as well. He sipped his orange juice. His stomach growled.

"Hungry?" asked Bob.

Jupiter thought his friend seemed nervous. While he spread peanut butter thickly on his toast, he watched Bob. His friend's hand trembled slightly as he poured cornflakes into a bowl. Something was wrong! Jorunn also kept looking at Bob but Pete didn't seem to notice anything.

Deidre yawned and stretched. "Boy, am I tired today!" She leaned back as if in a daze.

At the same moment, Jorunn toppled forward and her face slammed on the table.

Pete winced in fright and choked on his tea.

Jupiter dropped his toast. "Bob?" he asked, stunned.

"I'm sorry!" Bob stared at the motionless Jorunn. "I, well... I..."

Pete grabbed Jorunn's wrist. "No pulse!"

"What?" Panicked, Bob jumped up and circled the table. "It can't be!"

Jupiter rushed to Deidre, who was also motionless in her chair by now.

"It can't be! It can't be!" Bob did not stop repeating this sentence. With trembling hands, he grabbed Jorunn's arm. "It just can't be! It wasn't poison. It was definitely not poison!"

Pete backed away. "Poison? What did you give her?"

"I didn't mean to!"

"Bob!"

"Deidre is okay," Jupiter announced. "She's just passed out."

"And Jorunn?" the Second Investigator asked in a panic.

Bob was still struggling to find her pulse, but his hands just wouldn't calm down.

Jupiter pushed him aside gently but firmly.

Bob held on to the kitchen table in a daze. "Please tell me everything is all right!"

"She passed out as well, but her pulse is okay," Jupiter replied. "You two just didn't get her pulse in your panic, but something fishy is going on here."

The First Investigator looked sternly at Bob. "You know something about this, don't you?"

"I was supposed to knock you all out with a sedative," Bob confessed. "That was the order from the FBI!"

"FBI? Sedative?" repeated Pete. "What are you talking about?"

"The two FBI agents approached you!" noted Jupiter. "What do they want?"

"I'm supposed to look for some hidden documents here in the house." Bob had thought carefully about what he wanted to tell his friends, but now the words just bubbled out of him in disarray.

He told them about the meeting at the cemetery, the conversation with the two special agents, the assignment, the hidden documents, the code and the four elements. He also told of the second meeting with Ross and of the agent handing him a sachet of pills.

"I just thought he had given me the wrong drug!" Bob's voice was brittle. "For a moment, I feared that it was a deadly poison."

Jupiter slapped the kitchen counter with the flat of his hand. "With all due understanding for your situation, putting an unknown substance in someone's drink is grossly negligent!"

"And this is Jorunn Grey we're talking about!" Pete clawed both hands into his T-shirt. "You put Jorunn Grey to sleep."

"Sedated," Jupiter corrected him. "This now presents us with a whole series of problems."

"The FBI will take care of it!" assured Bob.

Jupiter glowered at his friend. "The FBI blackmailed you and put you in danger! Employees of a federal agency abused their knowledge and position to get to their target. Then they also changed the plan within a day. First you were just supposed to look around—and now you're to knock people out with sedatives."

"You should have talked to us," Pete said.

"That's what I wanted, believe me!" affirmed Bob. "I was supposed to administer the drug to you as well... but I didn't."

"We have to make the best of the situation now," Jupiter decided, "but we play by our rules. We each take a floor and look for the hidden documents."

"There is one more thing." Bob opened his backpack and pulled out the folder with the case information. "At Headquarters, I enlarged the photo of Silja Beroe..." He handed Jupiter a printed photo while holding a second sheet of paper in his hands. "Back at home, I further edited the image because I have a theory."

"Let me guess—you made a seal out of her?" asked Pete.

"No, not a seal, but I think someone can tell us what the whole seal thing is about." He turned the sheet over in his hands.

Jupiter leaned forward and eyed the photo. "Remarkable! Your theory could be right, Bob!"

Pete looked at the clock. "How long do you think Jorunn and Deidre will sleep? Shouldn't we start searching right away? I'm sure we'll have time for some theories later!"

"You're right," Jupe said firmly. "I'll take the upstairs. You, Bob, search this floor, and you, Pete, can have another look in the basement in case Bob missed something in his search."

The Three Investigators split up. Jupiter went up the staircase and ended up in the part of the house that the boys had not yet been to.

The First Investigator decided to first get a quick overview and then systematically search the rooms. He opened the first door and discovered a large bathroom with a whirlpool

tub, shower cubicle and panoramic window overlooking the sea. He would definitely have to look around more thoroughly here. After all, this was also a ‘room with a sea view’.

The second room was a spacious bedroom. The only furniture was a wardrobe and a double bed. The room looked unoccupied, like a guest room that was hardly used. Jupiter suspected that it was Michael Grey’s bedroom.

The First Investigator continued his search. He found a very meticulously tidy closet and a room that was used as a library. For a moment, he wondered if the clues from the FBI could also refer to a book, for example, a coffee-table book about the sea, a non-fiction book about seaweed, or an adventure novel in which divers played a role. Finding the right one, however, would take an extremely long time. The shelves were crammed full and books were piled up on a small table and even on the floor.

Jupiter hurriedly went on. He entered the next room, and it happened to be Jorunn’s room. Surprised, the First Investigator took a step backwards. He had expected simple elegance—a room that matched the rest of the house and the young girl’s outward appearance—a sparse interior, order and distinguished restraint. Instead, he looked into the room of a little girl. On the opposite wall was a poster of a unicorn on a rainbow. There was a doll’s house, pink bed linen with a bear print, glow-in-the-dark stars on the wallpaper and a whole zoo of cuddly animals. Jupiter discovered music boxes made of fabric, glitter stickers and snow globes in which little plastic fairies smiled to themselves. Next to the bed was a picture frame showing a photo of Jorunn and her father. On the pillow was a white stuffed seal. The First Investigator felt a slight twinge. So this was Jorunn’s secret enclave where she allowed herself to be a child.

The First Investigator stepped hesitantly onto the white carpet. It was as if he was entering a sacred shrine. The breeze from the door made a decorative mobile of stars and planets dance. The stars shone up in the dim light coming a night light.

Jupiter’s gaze fell on an old dressing table with a mirror on which stood a colourful jewellery box. Inside the box was costume jewellery—trivial stuff with lots of glitter and rhinestones, pendants with unicorn motifs, hearts, flowers and a gold ring.

Jupiter stopped in mid-motion. A gold ring! He carefully took the ring in his hand. In the centre of the head was a small embossed triangle with a horizontal line in centre. The symbol was green in colour. Surrounding the symbol was an engraved motif of numerous and randomly positioned squiggly lines!

Due to Jupiter’s impressive memory, he was able to recall that the symbol and colour was associated with the ‘earth’ classical element. So William Grey had the ‘fire’ ring, and Jorunn, the ‘earth’ ring. Jupiter only had a photo of the ‘fire’ ring but now he had got hold of an actual ring. This could well be the key to the hiding place of the secret documents. However, he still had no idea how it should be used.

Just then, a shrilled call was heard. Jupiter listened up. It was the call of the rare bird, the Red-bellied Flycatcher, and it was the secret call of The Three Investigators. The call sounded again. Jupiter pocketed Jorunn’s ring and ran down the stairs.

In the hallway, he met Bob and Pete. “What’s wrong?”

“I didn’t want to shout through the house,” Pete explained hastily, “but I found something. Come with me!”

He turned on his heel and hurried into the basement. His friends followed him into Mr Grey’s office and from there into the small bathroom.

“Take a look in the mirror,” Pete urged his friends. He had left the bathroom door open so Jupiter and Bob could see their own faces and the oval window behind them.

“In the mirror you can see the reflection of the oval window and hence the underwater forest,” Pete exclaimed. “So I immediately checked to see if I could take the mirror off but I couldn’t! It sits on a plate that is firmly connected to the wall. Behind it could be a safe—the hiding place!”

“But there’s no lock or latch or anything to open it,” Bob said.

“Hmm...” Jupiter went on. “Maybe you have to hold the rings in front of it...”

“Now look at the shower controls.” Pete pointed to the small shower cubicle in the corner. It was a model where the water temperature and strength of the jet could be controlled digitally on a control panel. Such fittings were expensive, but not uncommon among rich people or in luxury hotels.

Bob stepped into the cubicle and saw what the Second Investigator was alluding to. Two up-down touch-pads were on the lower part of a dark glass panel fixed on the wall.

“See the part of the panel above the touch-pads?” Pete said. “That is the display that shows the water temperature and jet strength. Embedded behind this panel, in between the touch-pads and the display is a small scanner... Very unobtrusive, since it’s connected to the shower’s electronics.”

“How did you come up with that?” asked Bob in amazement.

“Jeffrey has one of these in his bathroom,” Pete explained. “Anyway, I thought these things could do more. That’s why I examined it closely. If you shine a direct light on the panel, you can see the scanner behind it.”

Jupiter reached past Bob and switched on the shower. The display went on. A thin jet of water came out of a nozzle on the ceiling. Bob got a few splashes and jumped backwards. “Hey! Watch out!”

“It’s only water,” said the First Investigator. The display now showed the temperature in blue digits. “The FBI agent said something about body temperature, right?”

“Exactly,” Bob confirmed.

“That is 37 degrees Celsius in humans.” Jupiter set the temperature accordingly. A small red light flashed. “I think the scanner is active now.”

He took out Jorunn’s ring from his pocket. The first thing he did was hold the ring in front of the panel at the position of the scanner. There was a soft beep.

“Okay... as it is, the scanner detected the ring,” Jupe said, “but nothing happened.”

“Hold on,” Bob said. “Special Agent Wright specifically said that you need ‘two elements at body temperature’ to get to the hiding place.”

“That means we’ll need a second ring,” Jupe said. “The only other ring I have seen is William Grey’s ring.”

“As I understand, there could be as many as four rings, each corresponding to an element,” Bob said. “Maybe we have to look for another one here in the house.”

“Hold on,” Pete said and took Jorunn’s ring from Jupe. He looked at it for a moment and then said: “Look at this... the squiggly lines on the ring. I bet this works like those QR codes that you can scan to purchase items or get access to websites. The scanner detects not the ring, but the squiggly lines.”

“So?” Bob said. “We still don’t have a second ring.”

“We don’t need a second ring,” Pete said. “Jupe has a photo of William Grey’s ring. Why don’t you hold the photo to the scanner and see what happens?”

“Great idea,” Jupe said, fished out his mobile phone and found the photo of the ring. Then he twisted and moved the photo at the scanner.

Suddenly, the beep they had hoped for came. It was followed by a buzzing and then a whirring. The mirror slowly flipped open.

“We did it!” shouted Pete.

“A hidden safe!” Bob was at the mirror with two big steps. There, he could now peer into a square cavity containing a black folder. For being secured with modern technology, the folder of faded paper was really old-fashioned.

“We take the folder out of here and hide it,” Jupiter explained. “I’ll put Jorunn’s ring back before she wakes up.”

Jupiter handed Pete the folder and flipped the mirror shut.

“But I have to inform the FBI,” Bob said emphatically, “otherwise we’ll be in hot water!”

“Hold on to that for a moment,” Jupe said.

“Okay,” Bob agreed. “You have five minutes to think it over. I’ll be upstairs until then.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I have to go get some water to drink. Between hidden documents, a scanner, and two excited colleagues, I’m exhausted!”

“Okay, you might as well check on the two of them,” Jupe agreed. “Meanwhile, I’ll rush up to return the ring. I’ll only take less than a minute. Pete, you stay here and find a place to hide the folder. Jorunn should not know that we found it.”

Without hesitation, Jupe and Bob trudged upstairs. While Jupe made his way to the upper floor, Bob remained on the ground floor. There he went into the guest toilet and to wash his face. More importantly, he wanted to take a breath for a moment.

Bob wanted to think alone about what to do. He could understand Jupiter’s concerns, but he also feared that the FBI would turn The Three Investigators and Inspector Cotta in, not to mention that Jorunn would certainly tell her uncle about the sedative. Bob felt sick.

Why hadn’t he considered this possible consequence? After this action, the only guaranteed way out for The Three Investigators was through the witness protection programme—in other words, moving to another state. He would get a new name and a new life story.

Bob propped himself against the tiled wall of the toilet. This was definitely out of The Three Investigators’ league.

Determined, Bob pulled out his mobile phone. He had promised to contact Special Agent Ross as soon as he found the hidden documents. He scrolled to the number of ‘Sally Miller’ and stared motionlessly at the display for a while... until he heard footsteps.

Suddenly, Bob heard some shuffling noises outside the closed toilet door.

“What’s happened?” It was Deidre. She sounded dazed.

“We were sedated,” Jorunn replied.

“What?”

“Sedated!”

“And what are you doing with the Taser?”

“I’ll explain later, first I have something to do.”

Did Bob hear right that Jorunn had a Taser? Now he heard footsteps on the basement stairs. He felt icy cold. Jorunn was on her way to his friends—and she was armed!

Bob was startled. Almost simultaneously, he tapped the ‘Call’ button with his thumb. It rang twice, then Special Agent Ross answered. “Hello, Bob, are you—”

Bob interrupted him. “I’m at the Greys’ house. We found the hiding place of the documents and were even able to open it, but Jorunn has woken up and is armed. Please help us!” He hung up before the man could ask any questions. Then he opened the toilet door and got out.

Deidre limped towards him. “Can you tell me—”

“Later,” Bob said, as he looked around for a weapon.

13. Jorunn Demands Answers

Jupiter had just rejoined Pete in the basement office.

“Where did you hide the folder?” Jupe asked.

“In the drawer.”

“Couldn’t you find a better place?”

“The office is practically empty, including the filing cabinet,” Pete replied, “even the bathroom.”

“It’s as good as not hiding it in here,” Jupiter said. “Give me the folder then.”

Pete opened the drawer, took out the folder and handed it to Jupiter.

“It’s best not to let anyone know that we have these documents,” Jupiter said. “We might have to take it out of the house, but we’ll wait for Bob to come back.”

Just then, footsteps were heard coming down the stairs... but it was not Bob.

“You have betrayed me!” Jorunn appeared in the doorway. She raised the black and yellow coloured fancy looking weapon and aimed it at Jupiter. Both investigators knew that the weapon was a Taser—a long range electroshock weapon. It was used to shoot out projectiles that would cling to a body with little barbs to temporarily incapacitate the person.

The First Investigator tried to ignore the weapon that was pointed right at him. Instead, he looked at Jorunn straight in the eye.

“What is that black folder you are holding?” Jorunn asked.

“Jorunn, you must listen to me carefully,” Jupe said.

“Put the folder on the desk and then step aside,” Jorunn instructed. The Taser in her fingers trembled slightly.

Jupiter did as told, and then he and Pete moved away from the desk.

Jorunn walked over to the desk and opened the folder. “These are indeed my father’s documents. How did you know how to open the safe?”

“We’re investigators,” Jupe said. “We figure things out.”

“You never wanted to help me!” Jorunn burst out and then grabbed the folder in anger. “You sedated us so that you could search the house! You knew what the rings meant from the beginning.”

“Jorunn, please—” Jupiter began.

However, Jorunn cut him off. “I also specifically told you that the first floor is off-limits to outsiders. You have failed the test!”

“Test? This was all a test?” Pete exclaimed. “You just hired us to check what we know?”

“I do care about Silja!” said Jorunn, without looking at Pete. “The assignment was real, but I was also curious to see if you would take the chance to do your own investigation... and what can I say? You have deceived me in the most insidious way.”

“Jorunn,” Jupiter said with gentle firmness. “The Three Investigators never planned to drug you! Other people are responsible for that, and that is exactly why you must listen to me.”

“I don’t have to listen to you!” said Jorunn sharply.

At that moment, Deidre came into the office. “Put that Taser down, Jorunn,” she advised.

“Leave me alone,” Jorunn replied without turning around. “I can handle them myself.”

“While you were out of action, the case took a new turn,” Jupiter continued unperturbed. “We now have an idea of what happened to Silja Beroe and who is behind everything.”

“And for that you had to go through my father’s things?”

“I will explain everything to you calmly when the time comes, but now we have an important decision to make. As far as I can tell, we are dealing with certain parties who are desperate to get their hands on that folder.”

Jorunn shook her head. “I wanted to trust you! But now I know you really are an enemy of the Greys.”

“In fact, I have been from the beginning,” Jupe replied. “I know I haven’t told you everything, but I will gladly make up for that as soon as I have done my work. The only question then is whether you want to hear the truth.”

“I don’t know if I could trust you!” Jorunn yelled in anger.

“I would appreciate it if you put the Taser down now and work with us.”

“Where’s Bob?”

“Put the Taser down first, please.”

Jorunn lowered the weapon but did not put it down. At that moment, footsteps sounded.

“Bob?”

“Yes, it’s me.” Bob stepped into the office—with an umbrella in his hand.

“What do you want to do with that?” asked Jorunn.

“I thought I’d save my friends.”

“With an umbrella?”

“There was nothing else I could find... but obviously I don’t have to intervene.”

“Lucky for your friends.” Jorunn laughed dryly. “You wouldn’t have stood a chance with an umbrella.”

“Bob has found out some very interesting things and is on the trail of Silja Beroe,” Jupiter said. “I think he should definitely follow up on his suspicion.”

“Now?” asked Bob nervously.

Jupiter looked at him sharply. “Is something wrong?”

“Uh... someone may be on their way here,” Bob confessed uneasily.

“What?” Jupiter burst out. He realized that Bob had called the FBI. This was messing up his plans. He took a deep breath. “We won’t be intimidated.”

“How are you going to get out of this?” Bob asked sheepishly.

“Who is on the way?” asked Jorunn gruffly.

“You have long since lost me,” Pete confessed.

“I have a better idea,” Bob said. “Well, I know who is pulling the strings now.”

“Will you please refrain from cryptic statements in my presence?” Jorunn demanded. “I happen to still have a weapon in my hand and I demand answers!”

“I will explain to you,” Jupe said. “Meanwhile, Bob has to go check something out.”

“This better be good,” Jorunn remarked.

Jupiter, Pete, Jorunn and Deidre remained in the basement office. Bob has left the house and drove off in the Tesla.

“There is one person who knows what happened to Silja Beroe,” Jupiter began his explanation. He preferred not to lay his cards openly on the table yet, but he had to reveal at least part of the truth to Jorunn. “—And that person is also involved in what happened today. Bob is now going to seek clarification on this.”

“Then I hope for your sake that you are successful,” Jorunn said. She waved her Taser lightly. “Otherwise you’ll have a real problem!”

The door bell rang. Deidre went upstairs to check.

Jupiter looked at his watch. Bob had been gone for five minutes. Now he would have to stall the people from the FBI.

The federal agency officials were not the enemies. Jupiter, as an investigator, was on their side of the law after all—but someone here were obviously too overzealous in their operations without regard for other people. Apart from that, Jupiter felt obliged to Jorunn. She was and remained the client of The Three Investigators.

The First Investigator wanted to suggest to Jorunn that they keep quiet and hide in the basement office together. The girl must not be given the opportunity to develop her own plan, but Jorunn had already raised her Taser.

The next moment, they heard Deidre scream. A door slammed against a wall. Then footsteps followed.

“There are several of them!” said Pete.

Jorunn was about to storm off when Jupiter called out to her: “Wait! Jorunn, don’t take the folder up there!”

Jorunn hesitated only briefly, and placed the folder back on the desk. Then she ran upstairs, followed by Jupiter. If Jorunn attacked an official, it would end disastrously, but she was already slowing down sharply.

“Put the weapon down!” a deep male voice shouted, “or you’ll get hurt!”

Jupiter came up behind Jorunn and froze. There were four people in the hallway wearing face masks. They were dressed all in black and all armed. One of them held Deidre in a headlock. The nanny looked like she was about to lose consciousness. A few drops of blood seeped through her head bandage.

“Where are the documents?” one of the men asked. By now two of the guns were pointed at Jorunn, another pointed at Jupiter. “Tell us where they are or we’ll make short work of you!”

Pete looked around. He had heard enough to be seriously afraid. Now he was trapped in the basement office.

“Please don’t hurt us!” he heard Jupiter plead. The First Investigator sounded anxious and submissive and he spoke unusually loudly. “The folder is in the basement. I can go get it!”

Pete wasn’t surprised. Jupiter used his acting talent to tell him that someone was about to come into the basement to get the folder. With a bit of luck, maybe even Jupe himself.

“I forbid you to give them my father’s documents!” Pete heard Jorunn call out.

“You keep quiet, little girl,” the deep male voice said imperiously. “Now you, fat boy, you go first! And don’t get any ideas about tricking us.”

Pete would not stand around to hear the rest of the threat. He didn’t need to. These men were from the FBI, but they behaved like dangerous criminals. It was possible that they didn’t know how many people were in the house and were just after the documents. In any case, it was best for Pete not to get caught. He had to hide, so that he could go get help if necessary.

In a reflex action, Pete grabbed the folder from the office desk. Then he realized that there was no point hiding the folder as Jupe had already told those people that it was in the basement. He had to do something, but what?

Meanwhile, footsteps were approaching the top of the staircase. Quick as a flash, Pete placed the folder back on the desk. Then he scurried into the bathroom, flicked off the light and wedged himself behind the wide-open door. In this way, he had hoped that the intruders would not enter the bathroom to search for him after they had got the folder.

Pete closed his eyes in sheer tension and clenched his hands into fists. He heard footsteps coming down the stairs, closer and closer to the office.

14. Captured!

“There,” said Jupiter. “The folder is on the desk.”

“Get it!”

“Yes, sir!”

Footsteps were heard again. Pete pressed himself against the wall and tried to keep his breath steady.

“Open the folder and hold it out to me.”

“Yes...”

“Good. Very good!” There was a short pause, then the man said. “Give me the folder now.”

The footsteps moved away. Pete nevertheless remained motionless in his hiding place. Thoughts raced through his head in disarray. What was happening here? Were Jorunn, Deidre and Jupiter in serious danger? Why were they being threatened like this? Were those people really from the FBI? Then it wouldn’t do any good to call the police... and wasn’t Bob going to get help?

Breathe... think... then act. Pete decided to wait until the men had left the house. Then he would act!

Jupiter walked with slow steps beside Jorunn and Deidre down Solstice Drive. The warm wind ran through his hair. Behind the three of them were the hooded men, guns at the ready.

It was the middle of the day, but there was no one out here to whom this might seem strange. There was no one they could ask for help—Mrs Planter, at the most... and they were directed to walk straight to her boarding house.

Jupiter needed a plan! The men were definitely not from the FBI. If he was right, they worked for Betty Hale.

The documents in the folder had been extensive, but Jupiter had been unable to find any references to the Greys’ business when he quickly leafed through it earlier. Instead, there was a lot of information about the building contractor. Presumably there was some material in the folder to blackmail Betty Hale on a grand scale... and yet, Bob had only notified the FBI agents. How then could Betty Hale’s people have learned of the discovery of the documents? Had she installed bugs in the house or monitored the phones?

By now the group had reached Poseidon’s Lair. One of the men pushed open the door. “Get in there!”

“What are you going to do with us?” asked Deidre, who limped into the house leaning on Jorunn.

“Shut up!” growled another of the men.

Jupiter, Jorunn and Deidre were led through the kitchen into a fireplace room. Here too, it looked untidy. The fireplace had not been swept out, empty bottles and glasses were standing around on a small table. A fly landed on a plate with crumbs.

Before the First Investigator could look around further, however, he was already pushed rudely into an adjoining room. Here, there was a reddish twilight. The curtains in front of the

window were drawn. Something large and dark was moving on a chair and making grunting noises.

Bob entered the small police station. When The Three Investigators had broken into Mrs Planter's house two days ago, they had been brought here.

It was very likely that the FBI agents were working with the police here, perhaps even using it as an office during their investigation. Bob was not very familiar with the workings of the FBI agents but he had to start somewhere and the station was a good place to go to.

He walked briskly to the counter behind which a young officer sat at a computer. "My name is Bob Andrews. I really need to speak to Special Agent Wright. That is, the lady from the FBI who was here the other day."

The young man looked up in surprise. "I have to talk to a colleague first. One moment please." He reached for the phone.

Bob waited impatiently while the officer made a phone call. After that, it took quite a while until another police officer came and asked Bob to follow him. He was led down a long corridor, then the officer pointed to a door. "Special Agent Wright is waiting for you in there."

Bob entered. The agent greeted him with a curt nod. Her blonde hair sat like a helmet on her head as she did so. "How can I help you?"

"I will not be blackmailed any longer." Bob sat down in the chair opposite Peyton Wright without being asked.

"Strictly speaking, we didn't blackmail you, Bob. You should know that."

"Yes, you did, and that's enough of that! You will leave Inspector Cotta and us alone, or I will go public with some very explosive information."

"We are on the same side!"

"No, we aren't." Bob glowered at the woman. "I am definitely against blackmailing people, and The Three Investigators have no need to use sleeping pills in their investigations."

"Sleeping pills? What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the drug Special Agent Ross gave me to sedate Jorunn Grey so I could find her father's documents."

"What?" Peyton Wright was startled. "When was that?"

"Your colleague gave me the mission yesterday afternoon. Today I carried it out, and I have also found the documents in the meantime."

The woman grabbed her glasses, but then lowered her hand again. "Have you already told Special Agent Ross?"

"Yes, I called him."

"Where are your friends now?"

"At Grey's house."

The agent snatched the phone. Hastily she keyed a number. "Wright here. We have a problem!"

Something was said at the other end that Bob could not hear.

Peyton Wright had given up her cold temper. "There are young people in the house, sir!"

Bob wondered what was going on. Just a moment ago, the agent had dismissed him with a poker face. Now she was seriously concerned.

"I would go there myself if it wasn't for... Right... No... I don't know where Special Agent Ross is, but I don't think he'll go there himself... No." The agent ran her hand through

her blonde hair. “Of course we can prove it... but we have to act now! Surely the documents are enough... Excuse me? ... No, we have to send people there immediately.” Her voice grew louder. “Think of the innocent people there! And if you don’t care about them, at least think about the evidence!” She listened for a moment longer, and then hung up.

“We’ll send a team to Solstice Drive immediately,” she told Bob.

“Whose side is Special Agent Ross on?” asked Bob.

“All this is subject to the strictest secrecy.” She stood up abruptly.

“Just as tightly guarded as your role as an undercover investigator?” asked Bob in a friendly chatty tone.

Peyton Wright bumped against the desk. Her glasses slipped slightly. “Excuse me?”

“That’s actually what I wanted to talk to you about, Special Agent Wright... or should I call you Silja Beroe?”

15. Breaking Out of the Shackles

“Mrs Planter!” Deidre exclaimed.

The neighbour was bound and gagged. She growled and resisted the ropes that were knotted around her wrists and ankles.

It was not long before Jupiter was also tied up on a chair. Jorunn was still making it difficult for the men to tie her down, but already two guns were pointed at Deidre. “Hold still or the woman will make a spontaneous exit!”

Reluctantly, even Jorunn complied. After Deidre was also tied up and all three had a gag in their mouths, the men left the room.

Jupiter looked around. It was not the first time he had been held captive. It was necessary to check all possibilities. Were there objects that could be used to cut the restraints? Were the chairs rotten enough to break? Again, would that be possible without making a lot of noise? Was it possible to get to the window? Were there other ways out of the room? Could the captives help each other?

Jupe had spread himself as wide as possible while he had been tied up. He had stuck his stomach out and pushed his knees apart as inconspicuously as possible. There was not enough room to free himself, but at least he could move better than the men had wanted.

The First Investigator jerked back and forth. The restraints held. Then he began to push off lightly with his feet. The chair dragged across the wooden floor. Jupiter immediately stopped moving. The sound was too noticeable. Next he tried to lift his arms over the back of the chair. They were tied together behind it at his wrists but if he stretched them and bent his upper body to the side, he could pull his arms over the backrest and place them directly on his back. This gave him even more freedom of movement. He bent over until he was lying with his chest against his thighs.

The men had used scraps of cloth as gags instead of duct tape. He rubbed his face along his right knee, ignoring the pain caused by the stretching. The gag gave way and Jupiter was finally able to spit out the disgusting rag the men had tied around his head and stuffed into his mouth.

Now came the most difficult part. Jupiter was wearing cargo pants with several side pockets. In one of them was his Swiss army knife that had got him out of numerous precarious situations. He reached the flap with his mouth. After four attempts, he managed to grab the button with his teeth and tear it off. The pocket was open but before he could set about getting the knife out, he definitely needed a break. First he had to take a breath and stretch his back.

He glanced over at Jorunn. Apparently she had copied his tactics, and her gag had just fell on the floor.

“Quiet,” Jupiter warned in a whisper. “Don’t say anything out loud.”

The First Investigator noted that unlike him, the girl was sitting on a chair with felt pads mounted under the legs. The First Investigator knew this from some furniture that was for sale at the salvage yard. People glued or screwed felt under the legs to protect wooden floors from scratches. A pleasant side effect was that the chairs made no noise when moved.

“I have a knife with me,” Jupiter whispered. “Cargo pocket on the right leg. Button’s undone.”

“I’ll get it!” Jorunn slowly moved her chair closer to the First Investigator. In doing so, she positioned herself very deftly. She bent down sideways and reached into Jupe’s pocket with her bound hands. She didn’t have much room to manoeuvre, but after only two attempts she held the knife in her fingers. She pushed her chair further until she could put the knife in Jupiter’s hands.

What came next, Jupe had practised many times. Unfolding the knife with his hands tied was not easy, but doable. Jupiter had just enough room to move the knife so that the saw blade touched the rope. Now he had to work patiently.

Pete was freezing. He swam around between the kelp fronds and imagined all the things that were moving below him. He regretted a little his spontaneous idea and courage to reach the neighbour’s house via the waterway.

From the window at the Greys’ house, he had seen how the men had directed their hostages to Poseidon’s Lair. After creeping out from the house, he had carefully climbed over the rocks towards the boarding house but he was not able to get close enough. So he had slipped into the water. His plan had been to sneak into the boarding house from the back. He also knew that the boat shed there would offer enough cover.

However, Pete hadn’t realized how cold the water was. Although the hot winds had warmed the air considerably, the Pacific remained icy. Besides, Pete had to be careful not to get caught in the kelp. Something touched his foot. He suppressed a cry. It was just a piece of kelp, he told himself... or a fish—a friendly, colourful fish!

When he reached the rocky outcrop where the shed was, he was glad to see it. He looked around carefully, then climbed up over the wet rocks to the dilapidated shed.

Pete could see inside through the cracks in the weathered wood. The shed was crammed with smeared paint cans, tools, boards, firewood and boat accessories. On a work table, old newspapers were stacked next to empty bottles and an oil lamp with shattered glass.

Pete found that the door to the shed was unlocked, so he immediately crept in. He thought about what Jupiter would do in this situation. Presumably, with the help of an empty bottle, paint and a screwdriver, the First Investigator would outsmart the men, free his friends, capture the villains, and call the police to boot. Pete could imagine it vividly, but at this moment, his friend had been captured, so he had to come up with something himself.

Looking at the stuff that was available in the shed, there was only one thing he could think of.

Jupiter was free. He rubbed his wrists. Then he immediately set about untying the shackles and gags on the rest.

Mrs Planter groaned softly. “Finally!”

Jupiter went to the window, carefully pushed the curtain aside, and peered outside. “We probably have to swim,” he whispered.

“We can’t get through the window,” Mrs Planter said. “It’s stuck. It’s been broken for a while. You get it a hand’s width open, then it squeaks and after that only brute force helps.”

“That’s too loud,” Jupiter said. He peered through the keyhole into the adjoining room. He couldn’t see anyone there. “Can you get through the window in the fireplace room?”

“No. It only has ventilation flaps,” said the neighbour.

“But we have to get out of here!” hissed Jorunn.

"I would suggest that we split up," Jupiter decided. "I'll check on the situation. You look around as quietly as possible for objects with which you can defend yourselves. If need be, we'll hide for now until the coast is clear."

The door to the fireplace room was not locked. Jupiter crept past the fireplace to the next door. Behind it he heard a deep male voice. The First Investigator had difficulty hearing the man, but he knew a trick that was useful here.

He grabbed one of the empty glasses that were on the side table and held it with the open side against the wood of the door. He pressed his right ear to the bottom of the glass. Now he could at least hear the conversation a little better. When the man spoke, there were pauses again and again, obviously he was talking on the phone.

"Well, I'm sending Dean to you with the folder... He's packing up the equipment now... No, Keith and Bruce are keeping an eye on the street in case the FBI shows up, just in case... I know that... You can trust me, ma'am, but I'm not sure you can trust that agent. Maybe he's playing a double game... Yes, I believe you, and he's served us well... Yes, of course, ma'am... Yes, I am alone in this room, the others heard nothing. I can guarantee that... Okay, I'll send Dean to Malibu now."

Jupiter swallowed. The man was on the phone with a woman who was obviously his superior—maybe even Betty Hale herself. This woman could have bribed an FBI agent. Also the man did say: 'he's served us well', so this could refer to Special Agent Ross! This made sense—Bob had tipped off the enemy with his call! The First Investigator could only hope that at least Special Agent Wright was on the right side!

"Yes, okay... Goodbye!" the man said.

Hastily, Jupiter lowered the glass. In a moment, one of the men would leave the house with the folder. Then the evidence would be gone!

The First Investigator had to think of something fast when there was a loud boom outside.

16. Smoke and Fire

Jupiter saw black clouds of smoke through the window. The boat shed was on fire!

There was another boom. Flames shot up. The wind picked up smoke, sparks and soot particles and whirled everything high into the air. Such a fire would be visible even from the coastal road. Jupiter knew that the fire was no accident. It had to be Pete's doing!

"Dean, Bruce, Keith!" the man in the next room yelled. "What's going on out there?"

Heavy footsteps sounded. A door rattled.

"The shed's on fire!"

"Well, then put it out before the fire brigade gets here!"

"You got it, Mr Flake. Will do." There were heavy footsteps and door slamming again.

Jupiter quickly grasped the situation. He took cover behind a curtain. It was not a moment too late.

The door flew open and the man who had just been on the phone entered the fireplace room. As suspected, he wanted to make sure that his prisoners were still there. Jupiter heard the door to the adjoining room where Jorunn, Deidre and Mrs Planter were, being pulled open. He peered cautiously from behind the curtains.

Mr Flake had his gun drawn. As soon as he went through the doorway, something large and heavy dropped on his feet. The man yelled out and dropped to the ground.

Jupiter only realized at second glance that it was a bowling ball. It rolled noisily across the wooden floor.

The man clutched his foot in pain, but Deidre had already thrown a rug over him and Jorunn also reacted in a flash. She kicked the gun out of Mr Flake's hand and grabbed the poker from the fireplace set at the same time. "You're finished!"

"You little rat!" the man barked. "You can't get past my people."

"We have you as a hostage!" Deidre fished for the gun, gasping. "Tie him up!"

Jorunn and Mrs Planter grabbed the remnants of the ropes that were used to tie them up earlier to secure Mr Flake's wrists behind his back.

"Who do you work for?" hissed Jorunn.

"I'm not saying anything." The man didn't seem exactly intimidated. For having just taken a bowling ball on this foot and now having a gun pointed at him, he seemed surprisingly calm.

"You don't need to." Jupe stepped to the doorway. "You and your three men work for Betty Hale. You've taken up residence with Mrs Planter, watched the Greys' house from here and secretly launched dives in the bay!"

The man said nothing in reply, but it was obvious that Jupiter had hit the mark. "You wanted the documents that would incriminate your boss, and you searched for them in the underwater forest outside Michael Grey's office window. When the search proved fruitless, you had to consider the possibility that the documents were in the house. To help you out, an FBI agent took the opportunity to bring us in. It was from that agent that you learned that we had found the documents."

Jorunn raised the poker threateningly. "What do you know about Silja Beroe?"

"Who?" the man asked.

“Don’t play dumb!”

“I have no idea who that is.”

“She was in the bay when your men dived there!”

“What are you talking about?” The man looked at Jorunn as if she had lost her mind.

“Silja is not with them,” Jupiter said quickly. He had to speed things up a bit. As soon as the shed was cleared, the other men would come back. “Your nanny saved you—without the knowledge of these people, but now we should go now.”

“I’m not going,” the man said.

“Too bad,” Jorunn said coldly. “Then I’ll just have to use force.”

“No, we’ll just lock him in the storeroom,” Jupiter decided.

“Oh no.” Jorunn looked at the man on the floor. “I want to know what is being played here. Are the rumours true? Did your boss murder my nanny? Was Silja the victim of an attempt on my father’s life?”

The man laughed out. “You mean the old story about the yacht exploding?”

“Talk!” Jorunn raised the poker.

Jupiter took a step forward, but Jorunn paid no attention to him.

“You’re barking up the wrong tree, kid!” the man said smugly. “Probably the pretty nanny has become a nuisance to your father... or your uncle.”

“How dare you!” Jorunn almost spat out the words.

“Jorunn!” Deidre gently placed a hand on the girl’s shoulder. “Let’s go, please!”

“The other men could be back any moment,” Jupe spoke up. He was so tense that his own voice sounded foreign in his ears.

“Jorunn!” whispered Deidre.

Jorunn lowered the poker a bit.

“That’s enough.” Mrs Planter grabbed the man and yanked him up. “Come on, help me! He’s going into the storeroom now.”

“Just a moment,” Jupiter said and turned to Mr Flake. “Where is the folder with the documents?”

“It’s not with me,” Flake said.

Jorunn held up the poker again pointing at Flake’s body. “Where is it? Talk!”

“Sure,” Flake said. “It’s with my people. Try to get it from them! They are all armed. You won’t stand a chance.”

“Let’s go before they all come back,” Mrs Planter said.

Together they managed to push the man into the room and lock the door.

Outside the main door, a hot wind hit them. It smelled of smoke and burning rubber.

“To my boat!” ordered Mrs Planter. She pointed to a dilapidated jetty where her little white motorboat lay moored. A sandy path led to it between the rocks.

Jupiter looked around. Where was Pete? He squinted into the glaring sunlight. The burning shed was on the other side of the house, and from there, someone was coming over the rocks towards them.

“Get in the boat!” shouted Mrs Planter.

Deidre stumbled over the planks of the jetty. Jupiter leapt forward to hold the nanny. The wood creaked ominously under their feet. Mrs Planter tampered with the rope with which she had moored the boat. There was a bang.

“The guy is shooting at us!” screamed Deidre. So their escape had not gone unnoticed!

Deidre pulled Jorunn into the boat and pushed her down.

With an anxious feeling, Jupiter saw the man approaching with his gun raised. Mrs Planter, meanwhile, was tugging madly at the rope. Another shot echoed across the water.

Already a second man was turning around the house, also armed.

“Start the engine!” Mrs Planter demanded. She was still frantically tugging and pulling the rope.

Just when Jupiter thought she would never make it, the knot loosened. Mrs Planter threw the rope aside and jumped into the boat with a huge leap. They almost capsized.

However, the engine wouldn’t start. It just rattled and sputtered and the boat couldn’t move.

Suddenly a tree branch came swinging out of nowhere. It hit the first man with the gun hard on the shoulder. He turned around. Just like Jupiter, he could now see someone jumping head-first from the rocks. At the same moment, the man fired and the person disappeared under the water surface.

The gunman yelled something, but Jupiter couldn’t hear it because the engine finally roared to life. The small boat rocked and then made a surge forward.

Jupiter hardly paid attention. Pete had swung the tree branch and successfully distracted the man. But what had happened to the Second Investigator? And where was he?

17. The Truth Comes Out

Peyton Wright was steering a dark blue Buick towards the coast. Bob was in the passenger seat. The agent had told Bob that she wanted to observe the operation from a safe spot. That way she could intervene in an emergency. She had not said another word about the matter of the undercover investigation.

Shortly before the coastal road, the woman had to brake abruptly. Several cars were stationary leading to a road junction, although the traffic lights showed green.

“It can’t be!” The agent slapped the steering wheel with the flat of her hand.

Bob stretched to see the reason for the traffic jam. Apparently a huge truck was having trouble turning into a side road. The vehicle was blocking the entire road as it manoeuvred. To make matters worse, more cars had now appeared behind them. Turning was impossible.

“Will your colleagues make it in time?” asked Bob anxiously.

“I hope so!” Peyton Wright tensed her jaw muscles.

Bob decided to use the involuntary break for a clarifying conversation. He got straight to the point. “So the FBI put you undercover with the Greys.”

Special Agent Wright didn’t answer, so Bob just kept talking. “You were working as a nanny and spying on the family at the same time. The attack on the yacht was not the fault of any rivals, but was planned by you. You staged your own death.”

Peyton Wright said nothing to that either.

“I’m right, aren’t I?” Bob continued.

“There are things that shouldn’t be said out loud,” the agent said without looking at him.

“You blackmailed us and used us for your investigations. Not only is this dangerous, it was guaranteed to be against the law! At the very least, you owe us an explanation. Imagine what happens if we tell the Greys about this.”

“Now you’re blackmailing me.”

“All right, I give up.” Bob looked out the window with a sigh. “The Three Investigators don’t need to blackmail anybody. We’ll figure it out some other way—all by ourselves, using our own abilities.”

Now Peyton Wright laughed briefly. “Your ideas of law, morality and honour speak for you.”

Bob thought about what to say in reply, but the agent continued on: “Jorunn must never know who I really am.”

“Then why did you come back? Surely it’s a risk to reopen an old case as an undercover investigator?”

“We’re not investigating the Greys at all at the moment,” the agent explained. “We have another target.”

“It’s Betty Hale, isn’t it?” Bob asked.

Special Agent Wright ignored the question. “I soon began to suspect that someone on my own team was playing a double game.”

“Special Agent Ross!”

“I can’t tell you anything about that. All information is strictly confidential.”

“So I’m right,” Bob said with satisfaction. “What I’m wondering, though, is what you were doing diving in the bay dressed up like a seal.”

“Dressed up like a seal? What do you mean?” the woman asked.

“You rescued Jorunn from the kelp, didn’t you?”

“It was an unauthorized dive,” Special Agent Wright confirmed. “I was checking out a suspicion on my own... and it was a huge stroke of luck that I was in the bay that night. The people Jorunn got in the way have no scruples.”

“Why did Jorunn think you were a selkie?”

Special Agent Wright had to smile. “If you are going to be in cold water for a long time, a simple wetsuit is not enough. I wore a special suit. More specifically, a padded camouflage jacket in black, white and grey. These things have a hood that leaves only a small part of the face exposed. You look a bit shapeless in it.”

Bob nodded slowly. “—And the other divers were also wearing camouflage suits?”

“Probably,” Wright said. “They couldn’t risk being identified... but Jorunn still noticed that something was going on in the bay.”

“I see. When you pulled Jorunn out of the water, your cover was in danger of being blown, so you posed as a selkie.”

“The story of the selkies was designed from the beginning to comfort Jorunn. I always knew how it would end. Silja Beroe had to disappear at some point, but she wasn’t going to just die. I couldn’t do that to Jorunn.”

“It’s crazy, but she really believed it,” Bob said.

“In my job, you can’t afford to be emotionally biased.” Peyton Wright wanted to add something when the truck finally turned into the side street. The cars started up and the agent stepped on the accelerator. “We have to hurry.”

“Pete!” Jupiter spotted his friend in the water but Mrs Planter was already steering the boat in another direction. The First Investigator had no idea whether the men were already out of range. “We have to get to Pete!” he called urgently.

“We have to get out of here!” Mrs Planter hissed back.

“Reinforcements are coming!” Deidre snapped.

Jorunn looked up. “The police!”

Several police cars turned off the coastal road one after the other. The rocks along Solstice Drive were bathed in flickering red and blue.

“Turn back!” Jupe demanded.

It took Mrs Planter a moment to react.

“We have to save Pete. The police will take care of the men!”

The small boat set course for the Second Investigator, who was treading water wearily. With their combined forces, they managed to pull him into the boat without capsizing.

Pete was pale, but he grinned. “We did it!”

“You’re hurt!” Jupiter looked at Pete’s leg in horror.

Pete screwed up his face. “I got stuck among the rocks while trying to escape. It bled a lot!”

Mrs Planter handed Jupiter a first aid kit. “Put a plaster on it.” She got back behind the wheel. “Looks like those trigger-happy thugs are out of commission. We can head back.”

“What about the folder?” asked Jorunn.

“The police should have retrieved it from the men,” Jupiter explained. “It is incriminating material—not against your uncle and your father, but against Betty Hale. She sent those men

after us!"

"The police can have the folder for all I care," Deidre said. "Then this Hale goes to jail and we will finally have peace!"

"It's not that simple," Jorunn muttered.

Moments later, the boat was docked at the dilapidated jetty. Jupe and Pete jumped off and raced up the path towards Poseidon's Lair. At the same time, they saw Bob running towards them.

"Fellas!" Bob yelled. "What has happened?"

"How did you get back here?" Jupe asked, exhausted.

"I came back with Special Agent Wright," Bob replied.

"How did it go?" Jupe asked. "Did you manage to get anything out from her?"

"Yeah, but I'll tell you later," Bob said. "First let me ask you this—where are the secret documents?"

"Mr Flake took it," Jupe replied.

"Mr Flake? Who is he?"

"The leader of the gang."

"Oh no!" Bob exclaimed. "It was what I had expected."

"What?" Jupe asked. "What about the documents? The police should be able to get it from the gang now that they have been detained."

"No! Unfortunately not," Bob explained. "One of the men flung the black folder into the fire at the shed before the police got to him."

"What?" Jupe exclaimed. "Are you sure about that?"

"I saw him doing it with my own eyes. Special Agent Wright saw it as well. When we arrived, there were already three police cars here. From the car, I saw one of the gang members running towards the shed and tossing the black folder into the fire. Fellas, the documents that could incriminate Bloody Betty are gone!"

"This can't be happening," Jupe gasped, "but it's clear to me that if Mr Flake couldn't get the documents to Bloody Betty, he was to destroy it. Where is Special Agent Wright now?"

"She should be back there," Bob said. "She was speaking to one of the policemen."

"Let's go see," Jupe decided.

The Three Investigators rushed to the area where the policemen had detained the gang. Bob looked around, but Wright's car was gone. The grey-haired policeman came over to them.

"Where's Special Agent Wright?" Bob asked.

"She has left to attend to another matter," The policeman replied. "Anyway, she gave us specific instructions. We are to take this gang in for questioning. Meanwhile, we have called the fire brigade to come and put out the fire. It will be here soon. You three have to follow me back to the police station because we have to record your statements."

"We'll go there by ourselves, officer," Jupe told him.

Meanwhile, Jorunn, Deidre and Mrs Planter came up to them. There was a brief discussion on what had happened, after which, the fire engine arrived to put out the fire and Mrs Planter went to check the operation.

"Did the police get the documents?" Jorunn asked.

Bob then repeated to her what he had told his friends.

"Enough about the stupid folder," Deidre said. "You finally go on holiday! No classes, no studying, no sports! Is that clear? You're only allowed to do pointless stuff!"

Jorunn stared at her nanny in horror. "I can't!"

Deidre grinned broadly. "I insist on it! Come on, let's go!"

Jorunn and Deidre then made their way back to the Greys' house, while The Three Investigators were by themselves again.

"We failed in one aspect," Jupe grumbled. "We failed to submit the documents to the authorities."

For a while, Pete had been silent, then he suddenly spoke up: "There's something I have to tell you two..."

18. An Offer for Jupiter

“I had to watch six episodes of *Dracula Girls* yesterday!” complained Jorunn. It was the morning of 31st December. “The series is not suitable for children at all.”

“You’re not a normal child either!” Deidre yelled through the open living room door. She was sitting on the sofa with her injured ankle elevated.

“I won’t be able to keep up with my study load if I have to watch a TV series about vampires in love.”

“Vampires are better than selkies!” Deidre burst out.

Jorunn turned to The Three Investigators. “Come with me to my study. There we can talk undisturbed.”

It had been two days since the incident with Betty Hale’s thugs that ended at the boarding house. After Jorunn and Deidre had left The Three Investigators at the scene, Pete had revealed to his two friends that when he was alone in Mr Grey’s basement office, he had swapped the secret documents in the folder with some random documents he had found in a drawer. Then he had placed the folder on the desk before hiding in the bathroom.

When he decided to plunge into the water to make his way to the boarding house, he had hidden the documents under a rock. Subsequently, The Three Investigators, together with the grey-haired policeman, had retrieved the documents. So now, it was left to the police to take action. Since then, the three boys had not heard from any FBI agents—not that they, especially Bob, cared.

Jorunn led The Three Investigators to her study and closed the door.

“How are you?” Jupiter asked as Jorunn took a seat behind her desk.

“A curious question.”

“Not at all,” said Jupiter. “You’ve been through a lot in the last few days.”

“I basically experience a lot,” Jorunn explained. “It can’t be avoided with my family background... but now I would like to know how things stand.”

“Behind it all was Betty Hale, a businesswoman who does not shy away from crime,” Jupiter explained. “The FBI was on her trail and knew that she was looking for a folder—namely one containing evidence of her crimes. It also turned out that one of the FBI agents was on the take. He was passing information about the investigation to Betty Hale and keeping the FBI from diving in the bay. So there was a mole hunt. That’s what you call it when you want to catch a traitor within your team.”

“And you helped with that?” asked Jorunn reproachfully.

“It didn’t go against our mission,” Jupiter said. “Both cases were linked and ultimately the threat to you came from Betty Hale and her henchmen—not from the police. It was a diver of Betty Hale’s who attacked you underwater.”

Jupiter gave a terse account of the men who had rented rooms in Mrs Planter’s boarding house to stake out the Greys’ house and make clandestine dives into the bay.

“Mrs Planter was paid decently and didn’t know anything about it,” Pete explained.

“However, when people started destroying her bay, she suspected the men. When she started questioning them, they tied her up.”

“That’s what you get by doing business with criminals.” Jorunn smiled at Jupiter. “—But I still don’t understand why Bloody Betty was looking for the documents under water in the bay of all places.”

“For a long time, she had no idea where to look,” Bob reported. “It was only a few months ago that a former employee of your father’s went to see her. He told her everything he knew in exchange for money. It wasn’t much though—just a few snippets of conversation about an underwater forest, body temperature and elements. When your uncle flew to England, Betty saw her chance and launched a large-scale search.”

Jorunn snorted contemptuously, but then her expression became thoughtful. “And what about Silja?”

“She’s no longer here,” Bob said quietly. “In a sense, she could be a selkie, as in her song. She had to go away and no one is allowed to ask about her. I’m sure she will never return.”

“What do you mean?” asked Jorunn coolly.

“Perhaps you can say that Silja Beroe is a nature spirit,” Bob said slowly, “in your case, a good nature spirit... She saved your life.”

“I am grateful for that,” said Jorunn, “but I am not at all satisfied with the way this case has turned out. You know about the rings, my former nanny remains missing, and my father’s documents are now with the police. My uncle will not be pleased.”

“Betty Hale wanted those documents at all costs,” Jupiter said. “She might have searched the bay for another day or two, after which she would have used other methods. After all, her men were already scouting the entrances here in the fog. Sooner or later, they would have come straight to you. Your uncle and father can be glad that their plan failed because of our intervention, otherwise Betty Hale would now have the documents and you—”

“—And I might be a hostage—or worse,” Jorunn completed the sentence. “Scenarios I hate to imagine.”

“Well, in that case, your family would have retaliated against her and it will not end well,” said Pete. “Actually, I think Bloody Betty is very lucky.”

“I won’t say anything about that now,” Jorunn commented.

“Look at this way, Jorunn,” Jupe took over. “I’m sure your father and uncle kept those documents to incriminate Bloody Betty at an appropriate time. Now the police are handling it. Perhaps it is better for them to do it.”

Jorunn stood up. “As it is, Bloody Betty is convicted and peace will return to the underwater forest. So you are done with your work here. Am I correct in assuming that you do not charge a fee?”

“As a matter of principle, we do not take money for our services,” Jupiter said with dignity.

“Well, I think it is in your best interests, however, I will reimburse your expenses as promised.” Jorunn looked at Pete. “By that I mean the repairs to your car. In the meantime, you can use the Tesla.”

“Thank you,” Pete beamed.

“Deidre is defrosting frozen muffins.” Jorunn went to the window and looked out over the bay. “You can have one before you go.”

The Three Investigators was about to leave the study when Jorunn turned around. “I would like to speak to Jupiter alone for a moment.”

“Okay...” Jupiter nodded to his friends.

When they were alone, Jorunn said: “I have a couple of ultimatums for the three of you...”

“What are they?”

“One—you will not keep any photographs of our rings; two—you will not tell anyone about the rings and my father’s safe; and three—you will not use what you know about us against us.”

Jupiter fell silent for a while before asking: “Anything more?”

“Yes,” Jorunn said, “now I offer you a choice—you can just leave now or do business with me.”

“I don’t do business with gangland syndicates,” Jupiter said calmly. “If your uncle messes with us again, we will react... but I see no reason to do so right now. He is in England and was not even remotely the target of our investigation in this case. Besides, we have prevented a disaster here. The Grey family should therefore consider the matter closed.”

“So you still refuse to tell me the truth about Silja?” Jorunn looked at Jupiter piercingly.

“I can only repeat what Bob had said. Your former nanny has followed her destiny,” Jupiter replied. “That is the truth. Silja Beroe disappeared, never to be seen again.”

“Are you hinting at a supernatural phenomenon?” Jorunn frowned.

Jupiter hesitated, and then decided not to talk more of this subject. “Let’s say that we are dealing with a variant of the selkie myth here.”

“Is that all you’re going to tell me?” Jorunn continued.

“Yes.”

“You know... my father’s archives are amazing.” Jorunn put her palms together. “—But equally amazing is the knowledge I have stored in my head. I bet I have answers to many of your questions.”

“Thank you, but I prefer to find those answers myself. I am an investigator. That is my calling.”

“You have no idea what I can tell you.”

Now Jupiter smiled. “I’m not on the take. As far as I am concerned, this case is closed. I cannot tell you more about Silja. You should not look back either. Deidre is a good nanny despite her shortcomings. Give her a chance.”

At that moment, the door opened and Pete stuck his head into the room. “Jupe, are you coming?”

The door opened even wider and now Bob was peering in. He was holding a muffin in his hand. “Have you sorted everything out?”

“Yes, we’re done,” Jupiter replied. Then he turned to Jorunn and smiled.

“The muffins are great,” Pete added. “If you don’t come now, we’ll take your share.”

“All right. I’m coming.”